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Braverman and the Class Struggle
Michael D. Yates

A Classic of Our Time: *Labor and Monopoly Capital* After a Quarter-Century
John Bellamy Foster

The International Motor Vehicle Program's Lean Production Benchmark: A Critique
James Rinehart

On Twenty-Five Years with Braverma *Labor and Monopoly Capital*
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Before Braverman: Harry Frankel and the American Workers' Movement
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Books:
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BRAVERMAN AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE
by Michael D. Yates 2

A CLASSIC OF OUR TIME: *LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL* AFTER A QUARTER-CENTURY
by John Bellamy Foster 12

THE IMVP'S LEAN PRODUCTION BENCHMARK: A CRITIQUE by James Rinehart 19

ON TWENTY-FIVE YEARS WITH BRAVERMAN'S *LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL* by Joan Greenbaum . . . 28

BEFORE BRAVERMAN: HARRY FRANKEL AND THE AMERICAN WORKERS' MOVEMENT
by Bryan Palmer 33

BOOKS

An Asian-American Tale by Paul Buhle 47

A Black Rosie the Riveter from a Red Perspective
by Jack Weston 51

Mass Movements Need Mass History
by J. Quinn Brisben 55

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

Ideology comes, as we all know, in many guises, some more subtle and insidious than others. Children in the United States learn very early to think that capitalism means good things, like freedom and democracy, long before they're taught it in so many words. It's just something they take in by breathing the air.

The real trick, though, is teaching kids how the economy works while disguising from them how it *really* works. How do people grow up knowing all about the mechanisms of "free enterprise" without ever really knowing the first thing about it? How do kids, many of whom are

(Continued on inside back cover)

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As this issue goes to press, the United States and Britain are bombing Iraq. This horrifying event is taking place as the impeachment spectacle goes on. We hope to comment on these matters later.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Harry Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century *(Monthly Review Press, 1974), and the initiation of what has come to be known as "the labor process debate." In recognition of this, a major conference, "Work, Difference, and Social Change: Two Decades after Braverman's* Labor and Monopoly Capital*," was held at the State University of New York at Binghamton on May 8-10, 1998 (also commemorating a conference that had taken place in Binghamton twenty years before). The conference, which was an enormously successful event, reflected the rapid growth of labor process research in a time of expanding labor activism. Because of Braverman's association with MR, we were asked to organize the opening plenary session, entitled "Twenty-Five Years after* Labor and Monopoly Capital*." Harry Magdoff led off with remarks about Braverman, followed by papers by John Bellamy Foster, Michael Yates, and Joan Greenbaum. In this issue, we are publishing, in commemoration of Braverman's work, these three papers plus two other papers presented at the conference, by Bryan Palmer and James Rinehart. In February 1999, MR Press will be releasing a new edition of* Labor and Monopoly Capital*, which will include a scholarly introduction by John Bellamy Foster and two additional, little-known essays by Braverman—designed to make Braverman's pathbreaking contribution more accessible and its historic importance more apparent. All of this reflects our conviction that Braverman's message is more important today (in a time of worldwide economic restructuring aimed principally at the labor and production process) than ever before.*

—The Editors

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BRAVERMAN AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

by MICHAEL D. YATES

I.

Since Paul Sweezy gently rejected my first submission to *Monthly Review* in 1972, he and Harry Magdoff and all of the MR writers and staffpersons, living and deceased, have been my mentors, helping me to see things more clearly and to act more effectively. And Harry Braverman's book ranks near the top of MR's books which have deeply influenced my thinking. I remember mentioning it in my PhD defense in 1976. I told the committee that one of the weaknesses of my thesis, which was about public school teachers' unions, was that it had not incorporated the pioneering work of Harry Braverman in *Labor and Monopoly Capital.* I had a suspicion that the work of teachers was not immune to the forces described so well by Braverman: detailed division of labor, mechanization, Taylorization. Today, as the fine scholar David Noble will tell us, these forces are bearing down upon the professoriate, with potentially devastating results.

Not long after I read the book, I reorganized a course I had begun to teach, with the title "Labor Union Theory." I reconceptualized the course as a study of the capital-labor relationship. I begin it with an analysis of capital accumulation, using Marx's famous letter scheme, M-C-C'-M'. Then I argue that profits derive from what happens inside the workplace, from the power of the employer to extract surplus value from the labor of the workers. The trouble is that there is inherent in this

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a "labor problem," that is, surplus value must be extracted from what Braverman calls "an unwilling working population." This forces employers to continuously devise "managerial control mechanisms," and it is the study of these and the responses of workers to them which are the subject matter of the course. Beginning, as Braverman does, with pre-capitalist production, we move from the outworking system, to the factory, to the detailed division of labor, to mechanization, to Taylorization, to personnel management, to lean production. These workplace control mechanisms are always situated in a context of class struggle, which includes not just struggle at work but in the larger society and culture. While I have added materials (on lean production, for example), Braverman remains the heart of the course, and nothing that has transpired since the book's publication has rendered it in any way obsolete. In fact, as I shall argue, it is more relevant today than ever.

II.

Let me preface my main remarks with a quote from Paul Sweezy's "Foreword" to *Labor and Monopoly Capital*:

> I must conclude these remarks with a confession: for me reading this book has been an emotional experience, somewhat similar, I suppose, to that which millions of readers of Volume I of *Capital* have been through. The sad, horrible, heartbreaking way the vast majority of my fellow countrymen and women, as well as their counterparts in most of the rest of the world, are obliged to spend their working lives is seared into my consciousness in an excruciating and unforgettable way. And when I think of the talent and energy which daily go into devising ways and means of making their torment worse, all in the name of efficiency and productivity but really for the greater glory of the great god Capital, my wonder at humanity's ability to create such a monstrous system is surpassed only by amazement at its willingness to tolerate the continuance of an arrangement so obviously destructive of the well-being and happiness of human beings. If the same effort, or only half of it, were devoted to making work the joyous and creative activity it can be, what a wonderful world this could be.

It is, of course, our duty as radicals to energetically debate and criticize Braverman's work, but as we do so, let us also remember that little has really changed since 1974. Whether we speak of the labor of the nation's millions of secretaries and clerical workers, doing tedious work in front of computer terminals, which gives them permanent muscle pains and chronic headaches, or the tens of thousands of restaurant and garment workers in our large cities, some laboring for 100 hours per week

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for $2.00 per hour, or the child care workers, earning just above the minimum wage to take care of other people's children, or the 200 million child laborers worldwide, slaving away in rug-making, farm labor, and prostitution, or the hundreds of millions of unemployed, or even the army of part-time faculty members, the way in which most people spend their working lives is still "sad, horrible, heartbreaking." And let us remember that it is the great god, Capital, which is the cause of their torment and understand that it is this god's altar which must be demolished, from top to bottom, if we are ever to have a decent world.

III.

Having said this, it must be asked: how might this demolition be accomplished? Well, Marxists would answer that Capital can be overthrown through the class struggle, through the conscious acts of the working class. As we have just heard, Harry Braverman has been criticized for ignoring the class struggle, for considering workers as a class in themselves but not for themselves. I want to address this shortly, but before I do, let us ask another question: upon what sort of analytical foundation should the class struggle be waged?

Since at least the end of the Second World War, the conflict between employers and workers in the United States has been fought on the terrain of the labor market. The ideology which has motivated this struggle has been a sort of "populism," which, while criticizing capitalist excesses and extolling the virtues of the working population, shies away from a direct attack upon capital. For example, in AFL-CIO president John Sweeney's widely-publicized pamphlet and book *America Needs a Raise*, much is made of the long-term decline in real wages and the growing inequality in income and wealth. Similarly, the destruction of our social safety net and exorbitant CEO pay are decried. This is all well and good, but it is woefully inadequate as a basis for waging the class struggle. Its focus is upon the distribution of income rather than the production of that income, and it makes its argument in terms of fairness rather than right.

Let me briefly review some of the historical background for Sweeney's arguments. After World War Two, the left-wing unions were purged from the CIO and along with them any

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attempt by the labor movement to analyze capitalism critically. Organization of workers into unions on a mass scale stopped, and unions overwhelmingly became organizations aimed at servicing their members and keeping highly paid incumbents in office. Long-term collective bargaining agreements, nearly all with no-strike clauses, won higher wages for members, but conceded to employers control over the organization of work. Workers could file grievances over working conditions (often narrowly defined and constrained by "management rights" clauses), but these grievances were usually in the hands of union bureaucrats who often failed to pursue them aggressively or organize direct struggles in the workplaces to win them. (There were, naturally, some exceptions, notably unions which still had a strong left-wing presence, like the United Packinghouse Workers. It is interesting to note, in this regard, recent work by Maurice Zeitlin and Judith Stepan-Norris which shows that the left-wing unions typically won the best collective bargaining agreements: those with the shortest duration, the fewest steps in the grievance procedure, the weakest or no management rights clauses, and the least likelihood of no-strike agreements—in other words, those which challenged managerial control).

The fight, then, was to win higher wages and benefits, while yielding to employers the absolute right to manage the workplace. As you know, this has been labeled the "accord" between labor and capital. Unfortunately the "accord" was an insufficient basis for fighting the class struggle for at least three reasons. First, capitalist accumulation places definite limits on wage increases, even in periods of rapid capital accumulation. As wages rise, they help to accelerate the development of forces which create a relative surplus population or reserve army of labor. (By the way, Braverman's discussion of the Reserve Army of Labor in Chapter 17 is worth a careful reading, especially today, with the official unemployment rate in the United States so low.) These forces are precisely those examined by Harry Braverman, namely the detailed division of labor and mechanization. Thus we have seen a striking decline in the share of the labor force made up of workers who produce goods—not coincidentally those workers whose wages and rates of unionization have been the highest. Rapid technological innovation has allowed a vast increase in productivity in the goods-producing

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sector, which, in turn, has allowed fewer workers to produce vastly more output. The workers sloughed off by this process, as well as large numbers of women workers, find employment in the labor-intensive and low-wage service-producing sector of the economy and serve as possible strikebreakers in both goods- and services-producing sectors. The point is that long before rising wages can really threaten capital, capital accumulation itself places limits on further wage increases.

Second, as the historical record clearly indicates, rapid capital accumulation cannot continue indefinitely; periods of crisis always intervene. *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was published right at the end of the long postwar boom. Throughout this boom, capitalists were busy with the further alienation of their workforces, dividing up the labor and mechanizing; in other words, they were increasing their control of the labor process, and not meeting much resistance even in organized workplaces. When the long period of stagnation commenced, capital went on the offensive to restore its profit rates, enforcing the program now known as neoliberalism. In the face of this corporate onslaught, strengthened by capital's now increased control of the labor process, organized labor soon discovered that it could not make wages rise anymore, and bereft of any kind of anti-capitalist ideology based upon an analysis of how capitalism really worked, it capitulated into an abyss of wage concessions and acquiescence to the labor-management cooperation schemes being promoted by employers as window dressing for the nakedness of their anti-labor attack.

So bad had the situation become by the end of the 1980s, and so disillusioned the rank and file, that a revolt within the AFL-CIO's leadership occurred, resulting in the ascendance of the "New Voice" leaders to power. These new officers are doing many good things, as I am sure most of us here are aware. Yet the terrain of the class struggle, as conceived by "New Voice," is still that of the labor market and distribution. Our capitalists are especially greedy and our workers deserve more. As if the lower salaries of Japanese CEOs have anything to do with the accumulation of capital and its effects upon working people in Japan. Workers deserve a bigger share of the pie. As if workers did not produce the entire pie to begin with. As if capitalists are not, all of them, absolutely unnecessary for the existence of a human-centered system of production. And there is still a lot of

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deference paid to the idea that it is desirable for labor and capital to cooperate, mainly to insure that the United States can continue to gobble up the lion's share of the world's output. As if employers care at all who consumes their goods or who produces them and would not, at the first chance, move their facilities to the ends of the earth in search of more profit. As if workers in the rest of the world do not deserve the fruits of their own labors.

A third reason for the inadequacy of the labor market as the domain of the class struggle is stated clearly by Braverman himself. He says, "In this move [Henry Ford's payment of a $5.00 daily wage] can be seen a second element in the adjustment of workers to increasingly unpopular jobs. Conceding higher relative wages for a shrinking proportion of workers in order to guarantee uninterrupted production was to become, after the Second World War, a widespread feature of corporate labor policy, especially after it was adopted by union leaderships." That is, higher wages help to habituate workers to a system which denies them any control over their labor power. Implicit in this is the acceptance of the ability to buy things as the mark of human liberation. Naturally, I am not suggesting that workers did not want and deserve higher wages and benefits. But the struggle for these was not put into any sort of critical context, such that the fight for more money was not an end in itself but part of a larger battle for control of the labor process. Thus workers do come to see money and the attendant consumption as *the* end, and we devolve into a situation in which researchers find that steelworkers would rather continue to work long hours of overtime now, to buy things now, *knowing* that this will kill them before they can enjoy their retirements. [I might mention in passing that one weakness in Braverman's analysis might be his underestimation of the "petty manipulations of personnel departments ... in the habituation of workers to work." The system of lean production pioneered by Japanese capitalists uses very sophisticated techniques of hiring and brainwashing to get workers to identify with their employers, even, for example, convincing them that they are associates and not workers and getting them to time study themselves. Of course, that such tactics can succeed is proof of the absence of effective class struggle, of the failure of the labor movement to understand the nature of capitalism.]

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IV.

The labor market and all markets veil the true nature of the capitalist mode of production, as Marx and Braverman make abundantly clear. Therefore, it is bound to be insufficient to wage the class struggle as a market struggle. Instead we must look beneath the veil, at the relations of production, which show themselves inside of the workplace. And this, of course, is where Braverman comes in. First, he shows us that, "...work as purposive action, guided by the intelligence, is the special product of humankind." And further that, "Labor that transcends mere instinctual activity is thus the force which created humankind and the force by which humankind created the world as we know it." Through our labor we create the world and we create ourselves. To labor in this way, consciously and purposively, is to be human.

Now, the whole thrust of capitalism is to alienate us from our humanity, to deny to us that which makes us human. We enter the workplace, having sold our labor power, our ability to create, to the capitalist, who considers it to be property, on a par with the other means of production. To the capitalist we are costs of production, costs to be minimized whatever the human cost, which does not enter into the capitalist's calculations at all. However, we are not happy to have sold our humanity, so we have to be forced to do the capitalist's bidding. While this force is often enough effectuated violently, the true and perverted genius of capital is to accomplish it indirectly by reorganizing the labor process so that it is extraordinarily difficult for the workers to control it. Braverman shows us with wonderful clarity that the essence of capitalist management is control: control over the labor process and therefore control over the worker. First, the workers are herded into factories, then they are watched and the divisions that they make in their own labors are turned against them through the detailed division of labor. Machines threaten them with redundance and further de-skill their work. All of the piecemeal efforts at control are systematized by Taylor, who makes the separation of conception and execution the *sine qua non* of capitalist production. Both Taylorism and personnel management are reconceptualized again with lean production and its super-systematic hiring, just-in-

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time inventories, design for manufacture, team production, subcontracting, andon boards, and constant kaizening of the work. So careful have the capitalist's calculations become that workers in modern automobile factories (places which autoworker Ben Hamper, in his book *Rivethead*, calls gulags) work as much as 57 seconds of every minute, often for ten to twelve hours per day. The constant pressure to produce in circumstances in which the worker can exert virtually no control over the work, is what Braverman aptly describes as "a generalized social insanity."

It is in the workplace that capitalism shows its nature and not in the labor market, and this is what Braverman brilliantly and conclusively shows us, and what researchers such as Harley Shaiken, Mike Parker, and Jane Slaughter confirm. So if we want to wage war against this system, it is in the workplace that we must begin. It is control that matters, and it is control that we must try to win back. In other words, capitalism shatters human beings, and the task is, through revolutionary struggle, to put us back together again. Marx puts this with his characteristic wit in *Capital*:

> On leaving this simple sphere of circulation or of exchange of commodities, which furnishes the 'Free-trade Vulgaris' with his views and ideas, and with the standard by which he judges a society based on capital and wages, we think we can perceive a change in the physiognomy of our *dramatis personae*. He who before was the money-owner, now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labor-power follows as his laborer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back; like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but–a hiding.

Braverman, following Marx, teaches us that it is the *hiding* which is the issue. Just as a woman beaten by her husband cannot be healed by virtue of the gifts her husband gives her, nor by the fact that he switches from striking her with his fists to an open hand, so too the worker cannot be freed by higher wages or slightly better working conditions. Both the woman and the workers must defeat the power of their oppressors, escape their clutches and build new lives. By clearly analyzing the capitalist mode of production, Braverman has given us a means whereby we can understand this. Our understanding can then guide us to the appropriate actions and help us to conceptualize the contours of a new mode of production, one which allows us full and free rein of our human powers. Far from

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ignoring the class struggle, Harry Braverman in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* has provided us with an invaluable weapon in that struggle; for how can we struggle effectively unless we know exactly what it is we are struggling against?

Let me end this talk with a brief elaboration of the kinds of struggles which might derive from Braverman's analysis, a matter of some importance today, when, after a long period of relative quiet, the workers of the world are awakening and recommencing the class struggle. These are in no particular order and are not meant to be exhaustive. First, I hope that the labor movement will once again take up the fight for a shorter working day. So many people are laboring unconscionably long hours that they have little time to take care of their personal needs much less fight their employers or educate themselves. The less time we are under capital's direct control the better. And here I do not mean just shortening the daily hours of labor, but increasing free time during the workday, longer vacations, earlier retirement ages, etc.

Second, I hope that the labor movement will begin to reexamine the "no-strike" and "management rights" clauses in their agreements. These give significant control to employers even in the context of a union, whose purpose ought to be to limit this control as much as possible. Here the fight for union democracy, something which we should all aggressively support, will be critical. If working people are to take control of their lives, they must govern their own organizations. Even now, unions are the only institution in our society in which individuals can live democracy, not just learn the theory of democracy. Only by having this empowering experience and by having a living example can workers have the confidence and blueprint for transforming the world. If unions are structured as top-down bureaucracies, they just recreate in the workers' own associations and in the workers' consciousness the features of the work world which engender alienation. True democracy fosters the egalitarian spirit which must be central to any labor movement if it hopes to unite the working class, given all of the diversity within it. Democracy is a radical concept, which is why it is so seldom practiced. Therefore, the fight for union democracy is a precondition for any efforts to democratize the workplace.

Third, Braverman's magnum opus provides a firm foundation for workers' education, one which should be used not only

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by labor educators outside of the unions but by those inside of them as well. The AFL-CIO has produced an economics education package for workers titled "Common Sense Economics" under the able direction of AFL-CIO Education Director Bill Fletcher. By AFL-CIO standards, the package is quite radical, and of great use to labor educators—especially its plan to have workers educate themselves and teach each other. Yet it does not focus enough attention on the issue of control and what the employers' control of the labor process means to workers. Hopefully the package will continuously be expanded or at least used as a springboard for studying employer control, what it is and how best to combat it.

Fourth, Braverman's book more or less demands a complete reorientation of labor politics. As capital increasingly uses the state to enhance its control over every aspect of our lives, it is necessary that workers begin to see the state as a terrain of class struggle. As Ellen Meiksins Wood puts it, "In the short run, this means that political action cannot just be directed at offering capital incentives to do socially productive things, or at compensating for the ravages of capital by means of 'safety nets.' Politics must be increasingly about using state power to control the movements of capital and to bring the allocation of capital and the disposition of economic surpluses increasingly within the reach of democratic accountability, in accordance with a social logic different from the logic of capitalist competition and profitability."

Finally, the struggle against capitalist control must be waged on every imaginable front. As Braverman makes clear, especially in his fine chapter "The Universal Market," capitalists try to deepen their control of the labor process by extending their control to the whole of society, from the schools to information flows, to culture, to leisure activities, to family life itself. As they do this, they deform and dehumanize the whole of life and necessitate the formation of the broadest possible movement to contain and defeat them.

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A CLASSIC OF OUR TIME: *LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL* AFTER A QUARTER-CENTURY

by JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER

Three years ago, on the occasion of its silver anniversary, *Contemporary Sociology*, the American Sociological Association's book review journal, published a special section on the ten most influential books of the previous twenty-five years. Each book chosen for this honor by *Contemporary Sociology*'s editorial board was reassessed by a notable figure in the field. One of the books selected was Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital.* The sociologist who wrote on Braverman's book was Michael Burawoy. Burawoy's article, pointedly entitled "A Classic of Its Time," began by saying:

> There are two types of classics: those we remember and those we forget. Those to which we return again and again stand out as sources of continuing inspiration. They are sufficiently profound to endure and sufficiently multivalent and multilayered to sustain new interpretations. Such works are rare. More usual are classics whose impact is singular and therefore more ephemeral. They transform a field but are then absorbed and transcended. Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is of the latter kind. It brought together and reconfigured both stratification theory and industrial sociology, reverberating into political sociology. But it is no mecca to which we make continual pilgrimage. Its contributions have become conventional wisdom, the field has moved on.[1]

Burawoy then went on to depict what he saw as the many failings of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* and the ways in which a more scientific sociology had transcended it. According to

John Bellamy Foster is a member of the board of the Monthly Review Foundation and teaches sociology at the University of Oregon. He has written the "Introduction" to a new edition of Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* to appear in February 1999.

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Burawoy, Braverman's analysis begins and ends with a very simple idea: "what has come to be known as 'the deskilling hypothesis,'" according to which "management expropriated control from workers through deepening the division of labor, particularly the division between mental and manual labor ... How could such a simple, even unoriginal thesis," Burawoy asks, "transform the field of sociology?"

The answer, he says, lies in the weaknesses of industrial sociology and stratification theory at the time Braverman was writing. Sociology in these areas, up until the early 1970s, consisted largely of "a subjectivism that focused exclusively on responses to given structures and an ahistoricism which took those structures as natural and unchanging." Unfortunately, Burawoy says, Braverman in countering this presented an objectivism that was almost as unbalanced as the subjectivism it replaced. "Individuals are no longer conceived of as mobile atoms moving through a socioeconomic space, but are stripped of agency to become 'effects' of the positions they hold .... [For Braverman] workers were neither rational nor irrational, but instead, they were stripped of all subjectivity. They became objects of labor, appendages of machines, another instrument of production, executors of managerial conceptions." Indeed, in Braverman's theory, Burawoy goes so far as to claim, "worker opposition to management" is relegated "to the margins of history." Furthermore, we are told that Braverman's "simple polarization thesis" with respect to skill "does not work. Braverman himself had recognized that the rate of birth of new skilled occupations counteracted, even if it did not overwhelm, progressive deskilling."

Although *Labor and Monopoly Capital* "restored history and the specificity to capitalism" it nonetheless did not provide, according to Burawoy, the basis for a truly scientific approach. "Critical studies," he writes, "quickly emerged to counter Braverman's reduction of labor control to the expropriation of skill." For Braverman "management was a black box that simply transmitted market pressures into the expropriation of control" while more recent research has focused on the "managerial labor process." Andrew Friedman and others challenged Braverman's "objectivist bias" by emphasizing how management sought to "elicit consent to managerial goals."

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Labor historians, meanwhile, followed E.P. Thompson in developing a subjectivist approach that emphasized the self-making of the working class, depicting the struggles of workers against deskilling, and opening up the way to ethnological studies of the working class within sociology.

To be sure, "one can elaborate *Labor and Monopoly Capital*" by taking all of these elements into account in order to present a more comprehensive theory. "But," Burawoy asks, "how does its analysis help us understand class structure today?" There is no sense in Braverman, he claims, of the "global dimensions of production" that now preoccupy us at a time in which "class structure is simultaneously globalized and localized"—relying on global commodity chains and local specialization. Some even argue, Burawoy states—though here, he acknowledges, "a dose of Bravermania would do no harm"—that we have passed through a "second industrial divide," or have moved on from Fordism to post-Fordism, in which the labor process is now geared to "flexible specialization and a multiskilled labor force," leaving behind the Taylorism which was the object of Braverman's analysis. Thus *Labor and Monopoly Capital* remains "A Classic of Its Time," not our time.

What I find most fascinating about this argument is not these criticisms in themselves, but the fact that Burawoy is unable to sustain his critique. After steadily lambasting Braverman's analysis, Burawoy concludes his assessment with the following, as if determined to contradict his own thesis:

> *Labor and Monopoly Capital*'s absorption into mainstream social science has taken its toll. Its critical moment has been sacrificed. We have lost sight of "The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century." Braverman's point of departure was the craftworker who obtains fulfillment through the creation of objects first conceived in the imagination. His point of conclusion was the vision of an alternative future, a socialism that would not restore the craftworker but would instead recombine conception and execution at the collective level to forge a classless society based on democratic planning. This double critique from the standpoint of a vanishing past and a utopian future easily disappears in a welter of scientific 'explanation.' Moreover, the eclipse of materialist critique opens the door to an idealism—structure dissolved into a linguistic construction, and history reduced to narrative. Experience becomes discourse, oppression becomes talk about talk. The domestication of critique and the interpretive turn conclude with the separation of intellectuals from the working class.

I need hardly point out that there is a deep paradox here. On one hand, we are told that Braverman's model is too sim-

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plistic and has been scientifically transcended. On the other, we are informed that the current literature has sacrificed critique in "a welter of scientific 'explanation.'" When Burawoy laments the fact that the sociology of the labor process, which Braverman inspired, has lost sight of "The Degradation of Work," of Braverman's "double critique," of any connection to the working class; when he acknowledges that Braverman has been "domesticated," "absorbed into the mainstream"—the alarm bells ought to go off. Indeed, as Peter Meiksins has persuasively argued, the labor process literature quickly turned against its origins. Beginning with a crude reductionist interpretation of Braverman, it set out to qualify his results, and ended up, in the case of some critics, coming "full circle, arriving at a view of workplace relations which prevailed before his book was written." Such is the way in which ideological hegemony is reasserted.[2]

Having come this far I would like to go on to say a few words on the reductionist interpretation of Braverman. First, it is commonly asserted that Braverman's whole theory simply consisted of a "deskilling hypothesis" whereby skills were expropriated from the workers. Although the polarization of skill was certainly central to Braverman's analysis, the whole phenomenon of "the degradation of work" (a sort of material counterpart to what Marx in his more philosophical moments termed "alienation") was always much more comprehensive in its implications than mere "deskilling"—a term that Braverman never used. Indeed, the wider question that Braverman was concerned with was "the structure of the working class, and the manner in which it had changed," which for him meant how the proletarianization of the working class had proceeded. For Braverman the essence of the process of proletarianization lay in the fact that "a structure is given to all labor processes that at its extremes polarizes those whose time is infinitely valuable and those whose time is worth almost nothing. This might even be called the general law of the capitalist division of labor."[3]

Second, although Braverman, as he readily admitted, did not deal with class consciousness in his study—his explanation for this was that "in the absence of further concrete experience [of the kind represented by the thirties], discussion [along these lines] tends to degenerate into cliché, apologia, and the repetition of old formulas"—it certainly cannot be demon-

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strated that Braverman ignored the class struggle, as some have suggested. Rather, he was concerned with the historical development of management understood as embodying those characteristics that "Clausewitz assigned to war ... it is movement in a resistant medium because it involves the control of refractory masses." Braverman understood, like Marx, that the labor process, which was also a process of exploitation, was a struggle for job control (as well as living conditions), with the outcome determined by "the respective power of the combatants." Braverman's great accomplishment at the theoretical level was to deepen our understanding of class struggle by explaining that it was a minute-by-minute, second-by-second, struggle within the labor process (quite apart from the self-conscious political struggle of the working class "for itself.") Braverman illustrated this with his discussion of scientific management, and in his treatment of Gilbreth's "Therblig charts," in which the motions of workers were broken down into movements as small as ten-thousandths of a minute in order to be separated, reorganized and recombined in such a way as to enhance job control over workers, and, of course, the rate of exploitation. Explaining management in this way as a class imperative was a fundamental departure.[4]

Indeed, Braverman's whole approach, which rooted class firmly in appropriation of surplus product from the direct producer, helped to bring about a reconceptualization of class in Marxist theory as a relation of exploitation (as opposed to the more structuralist notion of relation to the means of production), in ways that dovetailed, interestingly enough, with the work of E.P. Thompson (who is often presented as a subjectivist counterpart to Braverman's objectivism), and thus helped inspire critical contributions in this area by later thinkers like Ralph Miliband and Ellen Meiksins Wood.[5]

Third, although Braverman is sometimes criticized for focusing exclusively on Taylorism, and thus a limited period in the development of management, which was later displaced by so-called "Fordism," such criticisms fail to perceive the broader theoretical significance of Braverman's critique of scientific management. For Braverman, Taylor represented the key to the understanding of the labor process because he broke down capitalist managerial imperatives into their most basic elements, and like Marx saw this process as analyzable in class terms, i.e.,

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as a class-based imperative built into the development of a detailed division of labor, logically independent of machinery. As Braverman, following Marx—but also elaborating on Marx in a monopoly capitalist context—argued, the machine is partly made possible by, partly brought into being in order to accelerate, these tendencies, that have their essential character not in the machine logic itself but in the class basis of the division of labor.

What Braverman did then was to launch a powerful attack on technological determinism, or the myth of the machine. One of the central problems represented by those who nowadays focus on so-called "Fordism" or "post-Fordism" is that technological determinism is often reintroduced as the essence of the process, in contradiction to both Marx and Braverman. This, of course, is in line with mainstream sociology. It was Weber, not Marx, who wrote in his most famous work that "the technical and economic conditions of machine production ... today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism ... with irresistible force."[6]

Finally, for those who contend that Braverman's analysis was narrowly restricted to the labor process and to a particular national context, and thus has been made anachronistic by the globalization of the world economy, one need only mention that the sweep of Braverman's critique extended to the emergence of "the universal market" and the commodification of life itself. For example, his analysis of the commodification of food through the development of food processing—its implications for agriculture, the constitution of the family, and the structuring of the human relation to the environment—constitutes a pioneering analysis in both the universalization of capitalism (which penetrates all spatial and temporal spheres) and the transformation of the relationship to the environment. There is no doubt that through his critique of scientific management, which arose in the labor process but was being extended to all other endeavors within capitalist society, Braverman was proceeding to a critique of the laws of motion of monopoly capitalism itself, on a global basis: the universalization of the market. As he said, "It is only in its era of monopoly that the capitalist mode of production takes over the totality of individual, family and social needs, and, in subordinating them to the market, also reshapes them to serve the needs of capital." For Braverman

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the analysis of the development of the labor process under capitalism was the key to a critique of the system in all of its aspects, extending far beyond the point of production, as well as beyond all narrow national boundaries.[7]

Perhaps Burawoy is right in one respect. *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, although a classic, lacks a timeless quality. It is a work of revolutionary critique aimed at capitalism—a society existing at a particular moment in history. Like all great Marxist thinkers, Braverman hoped that the class struggle would one day make his work dated—no longer directly applicable to society, only of interest to historians. I do not doubt that this will happen someday. But in the present and the immediately foreseeable future Braverman's work constitutes a tool of the class struggle, one that we can only put aside at our own risk.

NOTES

1. Michael Burawoy, "A Classic of Its Time," *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 25, no. 3 (May 1996), pp. 296-99. All subsequent quotations from Burawoy, not otherwise referenced in the text, are to this source.
2. Peter Meiksins, "*Labor and Monopoly Capital* for the 1990s: A Review and Critique of the Labor Process Debate," *Monthly Review*, vol. 46, no. 6 (November 1994), p. 46. See also John Bellamy Foster, "*Labor and Monopoly Capital* Twenty Years After: An Introduction," *Monthly Review*, vol. 46, no. 6 (November 1994), pp. 1-13.
3. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 3, 83.
4. Braverman, "Two Comments," in Rosalyn Baxandall, et al., *Technology, the Labor Process and the Working Class* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), p. 123, and *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 67; Marx, "Value, Price and Profit," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 20 (New York: International Publishers, 1985), p. 146.
5. Although class has been commonly defined in Marxist theory as "relation to the means of production" it is more accurate, in terms of Marx's own theory, to see it as a relation to the process of exploitation, defining exploitation as the way in which the surplus product is extracted from the direct producer. See G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London: Duckworth, 1981), pp. 31-52. The extent to which Thompson's notion of class started with the concept of exploitation can be seen in *The Making of the English Working Class* itself, where he devoted a chapter to the subject. See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963) pp. 189-212, and the related discussion in Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 76-107. For Miliband's approach see Ralph Miliband, *Divided Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 1-6.
6. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 181. For a critique of the concept of Fordism see John Bellamy Foster, "The Fetish of Fordism," *Monthly Review*, vol. 39, no. 10 (March 1988), pp. 14-33.
7. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 271. It is important to recognize that Braverman's understanding of monopoly capitalism was not one restricted to the U.S. or even to the developed capitalist countries. Rather, "Monopoly capitalism...embraces the increase of monopolistic organizations within each capitalist country, the internationalization of capital, the international division of labor, imperialism, the world market and the world movement of capital, and changes in the structure of state power." Ibid., p. 252. The theory he presented was thus global in its implications—pointing to the tendency toward a universalization of Taylorism as an outgrowth of the development of monopoly capital.

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THE INTERNATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLE PROGRAM'S LEAN PRODUCTION BENCHMARK: A CRITIQUE

by JAMES RINEHART

The Lean Production Benchmark

At the time of the first Binghamton conference in 1978 the Big Three automakers were operating with master agreements and pattern bargaining, and there were no Asian auto assembly transplants in North America. Shortly thereafter, increased imports, plant overcapacity, and recession set the stage for a major overhaul of labor-management relations, production processes, and work practices.

The 1979 Chrysler bailout marked the breakdown of pattern bargaining and the beginning of an era of concessions in the industry. Between 1982 and 1990 seven transplants or joint ventures opened in the United States and four in Canada. (One, Hyundai, is now closed.) While concession bargaining emerged in a period of economic crisis, the return of profitability did not deter the automakers' pursuit of concessions. With the arrival of the transplants, concessionary agreements, once restricted to wages, increasingly incorporated human resource policies and work practices modeled after Japanese automakers, especially Toyota. These included team concept; contingent compensation; outsourcing; collapsed job categories and increased flexibility of worker deployment; decentralization of quality responsibilities;

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participatory mechanisms; labor-management cooperation; and the elimination of work rules won in more prosperous years. While there are wide operational and management differences across companies and across plants owned by the same company, most Big Three auto plants in North America now can be characterized as lean production-mass production hybrids.

Academics associated with the International Motor Vehicle Program (IMVP), which is funded by every auto company in the world, are on a mission: to convince manufacturers to shift from mass to lean production and to convince everyone else that this is a good idea. In their influential book *The Machine that Changed the World* (1991), the IMVP trio of Womack, Jones, and Roos compared the operational efficiency of over ninety auto assembly plants in seventeen countries. They concluded that Japanese automakers in Japan, especially Toyota, followed by Japanese transplants, were the leanest, most efficient in the world. This research strategy exemplified what recently has become a lucrative business, viz., benchmarking studies. According to the largest management consulting firm in the world, Andersen Consulting, Inc., "benchmarking is the most powerful tool for assessing industrial competitiveness and for triggering the change process in companies by measuring such factors as productivity, work-in-process, defects, space utilization, amount of inventory, set-up times, and so on."

Womack and his MIT colleagues evangelically promoted lean production as not only the one best way to produce vehicles but also as a worker-friendly system. They stressed the system's precision and flexibility, tight inventories, quick die changes, and low per-unit assembly hours. They also made exaggerated, unsubstantiated claims about its benefits for workers: extensive training, multiskilling, challenging work, empowerment, and harmonious labor-management relations. These humane arrangements arise not just from management's employment of sound human resource policies. The fragility of a lean system, especially its just-in-time (JIT) deliveries and production processes and workers' quality responsibilities, allegedly obligates management to use practices that commit workers to the company and its objectives. Like it or not, lean companies have got to be nice to their workers.

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IMVP'S "Retreat"

In their recent book *After Lean Production* (1997), Kochan, Lansbury, and MacDuffie retreated from the unsubstantiated argument advanced by their IMVP colleagues, viz., that lean production provides challenging jobs performed by multiskilled workers in a high-trust, participatory environment. Now the IMVP group simply maintains that the optimal efficiency of lean manufacturing techniques *requires* "high involvement" work practices and human resource policies. These are teams; extensive job rotation; problem-solving groups; suggestion programs; inspection by production workers; hiring criteria that stress willingness to learn and get along with others rather than prior manufacturing experience; long hours of training; contingent compensation (merit pay, profit-sharing, bonuses); and few status differentials (no special cafeterias or parking lots, for example). While IMVP's retreat from its earlier position on lean production's impact on workers is welcome, it is open to criticism.

First, many of IMVP's involvement criteria give no indication of involvement. For example, plants get high involvement scores on the team criterion solely on the basis of having a large percentage of their workforce organized in teams. There is no measure of the degree of team autonomy. We concluded from our longitudinal, in-plant study of CAMI, a GM-Suzuki auto assembly plant heralded as a lean production showcase, that there was little scope for team autonomy.[1] Standardized, short-cycled, line-paced work, JIT pull processes and low inventory, as well as several layers of production management precluded any but the most routine kinds of team discretion. CAMI is not exceptional in this regard. Teams in most of the world's auto plants, including the leanest, have only a fraction of the discretion enjoyed by workers in some Scandinavian factories.[2]

The same criticism applies to training. Ratings are based on hours rather than content, and most of the training in lean plants is ideological and pertains to "soft skills." Ditto for job rotation. For IMVP, the more extensive the job rotation the higher the involvement score, but there is no measure of the complexity of the jobs or the skills demanded of the jobs through which workers rotate. Job rotation involves routine variety and workers who are multitasked, not multiskilled.[3]

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Nowhere in the literature is there evidence of multiskilled production workers in lean plants.

Second, the existence of IMVP's "high involvement" practices does not preclude a stressful work environment. Independent of the extent to which enlightened human resource practices exist, lean production manufacturing techniques such as JIT, the reduction of buffers, the elimination of off-line sub-assembly stations, highly standardized, short-cycled jobs, and the continuous reduction of non-value-added labor invariably increase the pace and intensity of work. CAMI has a full complement of "high involvement" work practices and human resource policies, but most job cycles range from one and a half to three minutes, and some of the most contentious issues are time study, job standards, and workloads.[4]

IMVP does not measure workloads, work intensity, job complexity, overtime demands, or health and safety problems, especially repetitive strain injuries (RSIs). Recently the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) conducted its own benchmarking studies. The union's benchmarking criteria, however, reflected workers' rather than management's perspectives.

The first CAW survey was based on the responses of nearly 2,500 workers in GM, Chrysler, Ford, and CAMI auto assembly plants in Canada. It found every plant had become leaner over the past five or six years, but GM had moved the fastest and the farthest, followed by Ford and Chrysler. CAMI was lean to begin with. JIT procedures were implemented, buffers were reduced; work-in-process was maximized; job content was increased; workers' performance was electronically monitored; and there was a continuous effort to reduce waste, i.e., non-value-added labor.[5] Slightly over 70 percent of the respondents said their workload had increased in the last two years. Workers in the leanest plants, GM and CAMI, said they had the heaviest and fastest work, and they reported the highest degree of physical health risks, exhaustion, and stress. Workers at GM, followed by those at CAMI, were substantially more likely than their counterparts at Ford and Chrysler to report low levels of autonomy and control. So much for the empowered workers of lean production.[6]

The CAW also surveyed 1,670 workers employed in the independent auto parts sector in Canada. The companies were placed in one of four categories, ranging from traditional

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Fordist to lean. It is worth quoting at length the study conclusions: "[C]ompared with workers in traditional Fordist-style plants, those at lean companies reported their workload was heavier and faster. They reported workloads were increasing and becoming even faster. They did not report it was easier to change things they did not like about their job. They did report that it was becoming more difficult to get time off and were more likely to have to find a replacement worker before they could go to the washroom. They were more likely to report that they would be unlikely to maintain their current work pace until age 60."[7]

Conditions like these have been observed in lean plants throughout the world. There is no more revealing evidence of lean production's negative impact on workers than recent developments at Toyota in Japan. Due to tight labor markets and worker discontent, Toyota modified key elements of lean by relaxing JIT procedures, moving tasks from the main to sub-assembly lines, and by adding buffers between the main lines.

It is difficult to see how even the most enlightened human resource policies might ease workers' daily burdens in lean factories. As we observed in our book, "Wherever it operates, lean production strives to operate with minimal labor. It is a system that aspires to eliminate all buffers save one: an understaffed workforce that is expected to make up for production glitches, line stoppages, unbalanced production scheduling, and injured or absent workers through intensified effort and overtime. The true buffers in this system are workers."

Third, the "high involvement" practices specified by IMVP do not ensure, let alone correlate strongly with, optimal efficiency. At Toyota in Japan, the undisputed champion of lean production, job design is Taylorist, production is planned and managed from the top, and all employees experience "relentless" pressure. Improvement activity (kaizen) is done mainly by production managers, engineers, and team leaders, as workers are too busy with their jobs to be heavily involved.[8] Conversely, efficiency can be achieved without "enlightened" human resource policies. Big Three plants in Canada, for example, rank high on productivity and quality without many of the "high involvement" practices specified by IMVP.[9] IMVP gave high marks on efficiency and quality to the Ford plant in Hermosillo, Mexico. In fact, Womack, Jones, and Roos stated that the plant's

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quality "was better than that of the best Japanese plants and the best North American transplants." However, there is little evidence of enlightened human resource policies, and labor-management relations are highly conflictual. The plant has been hit by strikes, boycotts, and line stoppages, and labor turnover ranges between 25 and 44 percent.

Evidence from around the world indicates that lean production is most advanced in greenfield sites (where plant location and new workers are carefully screened) and where companies face severe competition, shrinking markets, overcapacity, and falling profits, i.e., where companies' threats of employment cutbacks and/or plant closure are not idle. Relatedly, lean production is least advanced where threats to jobs do not exist and where the union movement or local is strong and militant. Unless we believe these unions are ignorant of the true character of lean production, their scepticism of and opposition to this system are indicative of its detrimental effects on workers.

NUMMI and Saturn as Model Plants

It is surprising that even some left-leaning academics portray NUMMI (jointly owned by GM and Toyota, and run on Toyota principles) as a model plant. For example, in her recent book *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late 20th Century* (1997), Ruth Milkman unfavorably contrasts Big Three plants with NUMMI, attributing NUMMI's efficiency and high-quality products to shopfloor harmony and a participatory environment. There are several problems with this argument.

First, it ignores Toyota's acknowledged superior capacity to produce vehicles that are easy to manufacture. Ease of manufacture means vehicles that have a minimum number of components to be assembled, which translates into low assembly hours required to build a vehicle. Second, Milkman ignores the long periods of joblessness experienced by NUMMI workers, most of whom were thrown out of work for several years by the closure of the GM plant that now houses NUMMI.[10] It is unrealistic to think that workers' "cooperation" is not influenced by this experience and fears of another plant shutdown. Third, Milkman's enthusiasm for participation (even supposing NUMMI's brand is the genuine article) is puzzling in that she cites much evidence showing, at best, a weak relationship between participation and productivity. Fourth, labor-manage-

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ment cooperation is far from perfect. Petitions have protested understaffing and the company's strict absenteeism policy. The rank and file have elected union candidates who ran on slates criticizing NUMMI's heavy workloads, speed-up, a high rate of RSIs, and management favoritism. The plant was hit by a walk-out in 1994. Finally, almost everything written on NUMMI has come from one enthusiastic source, viz., Paul Adler, a professor in the Department of Management Organization at the University of Southern California.

Academics associated with the IMVP portray the Saturn plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee, as a "post-lean" model of efficiency and organizational governance. Saturn is a team concept plant that uses lean manufacturing processes, but its most unusual feature is the extensive web of collaboration between the company and the union. Proponents call it "the boldest experiment in comanagement in the United States today." The company operates with joint union-management decision-making bodies at various organizational levels, and the union is involved in decisions concerning supplier and dealer selection, choice of technology, and product development. At the departmental level, managerial responsibilities are not handled by foremen and general foremen, but by "partnered" union reps and managers. That one half of middle managers are union members "challenges long-held beliefs about the separation of management and labor."

Many of the problems associated with and criticisms leveled against the labor-management cooperative agreements of the 1920s apply to Saturn. How can a union represent and promote the independent interests of workers when it is so heavily involved in managing workers and supporting whatever it takes to increase output and keep labor costs low? To the extent that union representatives are compromised by management and adopt managerial attitudes, workers' interests will be subordinated to the achievement of goals set by the company.

This is not a hypothetical dilemma. Surveys and focus group interviews of workers revealed a build-up of dissatisfaction with the union's capacity to adequately represent its membership. Rank and file dissatisfaction with the union is reflected by the presence of oppositional caucuses and hotly-contested union elections. Shopfloor pressure was successful in changing union crew leader selection from appointment to election and

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empowering those crew leaders to file members' grievances. Even Solidarity House now questions the union local's ability to effectively address members' problems and is opposed to extending this kind of union-management partnership arrangement to other plants.

With Saturn sales slipping and workers' bonuses falling, the union local held a referendum in March 1998 that could have abolished the collaborative agreement in favor of a traditional UAW-GM contract. Workers voted two-to-one in favor of maintaining the special arrangements. The vote, it appears, was not an endorsement of labor-management cooperation. Rather, it reflected workers' fears about job security. The president of the local warned that changing the contract, which guarantees no lay-offs except for cataclysmic events or severe economic conditions, would result in 2,700 workers being laid off.

Conclusions

Concessions in the U.S. auto industry began as an attack on wages but quickly embraced restructured production processes and work practices. With the arrival of Japanese transplants, concessions-driven bargaining increasingly incorporated elements of lean manufacturing processes, modes of organizing and deploying workers, and outsourcing. Despite the vigorous efforts of IMVP to promote lean production as mutually beneficial to labor and capital, rapidly accumulating evidence from around the world indicates otherwise. Lean production has failed miserably to live up to its promise of humanizing the workplace. This has become so obvious that IMVP has had to retreat from its original claim of an invariable connection between lean manufacturing techniques and enlightened human resource policies and work practices. Now IMVP simply argues that the full advantages of lean manufacturing procedures can only be realized under enlightened management policies, but their definition of enlightened, as we have seen, is highly questionable.

IMVP portrays NUMMI and Saturn as models of efficiency and harmonious labor-management relations. That progressive academics have begun to endorse these two plants says a great deal not only about the influence of the

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IMVP but also about the sorry state of work and industrial relations in the U.S. auto industry.

NOTES

1. We found nothing in the lean production work process that necessitated teams. They were not technically required but a product of social engineering. Nearly all operations in the plant could be done without a team. See J. Rinehart, C. Huxley, and D. Robertson, *Just Another Car Factory: Lean Production and its Discontents* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
2. Paul Adler, a proponent of lean production, admits that neither individual workers nor work teams have much autonomy under lean production. However, he argues that worker autonomy is obsolete. Due to *interdependence* of workers arising from the "deepening" social and technical division of labor, the issue now is the "much more modest question of participation." (See Adler's article in *Perspectives on Work*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 61-65.) Adler's logic is similar to that of economists who, with each increase in the unemployment rate, raise what they consider to be the natural and, hence, acceptable level of joblessness.
3. Academics associated with IMVP invariably refer to workers in lean plants as multiskilled, as if such repetition will make it so.
4. The existence of such conflicts speaks volumes about the appropriateness of calling lean production post-Fordist.
5. An example of a reduction of non-value-added labor is the elimination of the steps an assembler takes to pick up a bumper that is to be attached to a car. The attachment adds value but the steps do not.
6. See David Roberston, et al., "The CAW Working Conditions Study: Benchmarking Auto Assembly Plants," (CAW-Canada, North York, Ontario, 1996).
7. See Wayne Lewchuk and David Robertson, "Working Conditions Under Lean Production: A Worker-based Benchmarking Study," *Asia Pacific Business Review*, Summer 1996.
8. This description of Toyota is from Mitsuo Ishida's article in *After Lean Production*.
9. That efficiencies can be realized in the absence of even the most genuinely progressive human resource practices is no mystery. Most workers take pride in doing a good job and are concerned about making quality products. Moreover, there are functional alternatives to commitment, alternatives that produce behaviors similar to those exhibited by committed workers. These *compliant* behaviors arise from the more coercive sources of "motivation," such as high unemployment, higher underemployment, job insecurity, etc.
10. NUMMI chronicler and enthusiast Paul Adler refers to NUMMI workers as motivated by "a mature sense of realism" and an understanding that they must earn their money "in the old-fashioned way." This is another way of saying that NUMMI workers are terribly insecure.

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ON TWENTY-FIVE YEARS WITH BRAVERMAN'S *LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL* (OR, HOW DID CONTROL AND COORDINATION OF LABOR GET INTO THE SOFTWARE SO QUICKLY?)

by JOAN GREENBAUM

I was extremely pleased to have the opportunity to read, once again, Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* and to reflect on the last twenty-five years. While the years seem to gallop now, I want to try in this brief time period to capture a few moments and reflections and share them with you.

To set the stage for this I will take you back to my graduate days when I had to write a paper for a course on *Capital,* at the New School, taught by Paul Sweezy. He said two things that stuck in my mind (I am sure that he said a lot of other memorable things, but reflections and memory being what they are, here is what I remember): 1) don't read the first chapter of *Capital* first, as it makes no sense by itself; rather, start with the concrete data in Chapter XIV on Division of Labor and Manufacture; and 2) write a paper that connects what you have learned with some experience you have. The chapter, of course, opened my eyes to detailed division of labor which, regardless of current management claims and the so-called new market conditions, still outlines the shape of the labor process. And Sweezy's specific advice about writing what you know led me to write about my experiences as a programmer and systems analyst in the com-

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puter field and to try to capture what I knew in the net of the theoretical framework I was learning.

Enter Harry Braverman who, unfortunately, I never met, but who influenced my first article and has deeply affected my subsequent research. From his hospital bed he wrote a commentary on the paper I had given Paul Sweezy, and from his comments I was able to see how I could further squeeze the life of my experience into a framework that could be useful for looking at the broader picture. In the tradition of letter-writing critique, which I am afraid we lose in the quicker pace of rapid finger movement in e-mailed critiques, he gave me pause to reflect on my practice and examine the details of individual labor process changes in light of larger tendencies. To be specific, my re-reading brings me back to the urgencies of the tendencies: namely, the way the labor process is shaped and remolded to extract higher levels of exploitation for greater surplus value, and the wake of alienation this process leaves behind.

Now I want to add one additional historical note and that is Braverman's warning to himself, in the Introduction, to avoid romanticizing the past and placing the bygone days of craft work up on a pedestal. That is a message that I have had to take to heart again and again as I look at how office work has changed in my own working life. I am reminded of a message from my youngest son when he read through drafts of my book *Windows on the Workplace*. "Mom," he said, "your generation spent so much time complaining about your jobs, and now you are complaining about there not being any jobs like the ones you didn't like."

Braverman put passion into his writing. Rather than base his arguments on romanticization of the past, he used his work experience and his extremely well-researched arguments to show that managerial strategy could be bent into many forms in order to lower the overall wage bill. Control over skill was, and remains, one of the main mechanisms management uses to decrease wages and increase control, but many readers or people offering quick commentary have gotten the specifics of so-called deskilling confused with the general tendency toward controlling the labor process. As I wrote in MR's special commemoration issue in 1994, the skill debates in the 1980s seem to have taken researchers into the forest and mesmerized them

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with each individual tree offering evidence of "upskilling," without drawing a map of the whole forest.

Here is a brief sketch of an overall map as I see it, with arrows pointing to the ways that *control and coordination* of labor have increasingly been imbedded into software and the infrastructure of the Internet. This is a process that happens not through some invisible technological force, but through the labor process of developing information system specifications, which reinforce capital's need to maintain control and coordination over labor, even (and perhaps especially) when the labor process no longer takes place under one roof, but is spread out over time and space.

Braverman cites Babbage who, writing in 1832, not only outlined the concept of modern management but is also credited with developing the theory for the first "analytical engine" or computer. Babbage said:

> that the master manufacturer, by dividing the work to be executed into different processes each requiring different degrees of skill or of force, can purchase exactly that precise quantity of both which is necessary for each process, whereas, if the whole process were executed by one workman, that person must possess sufficient skill to perform the most difficult, and sufficient strength to execute the most laborious, of the operations into which the art is divided. (80)

The design of information systems today is built on a base of previous divisions of labor. When Babbage, and Taylor after him, described the needs of industrial capital, they spoke of dividing "head from hands" and separating tasks so that repetition would drive up work speed and press down costs. There are three things about this that I want to stress:

1). Now those divided tasks can be reintegrated into new labor processes like that of, for example, telephone call-center operators. But those reintegrated tasks are based on a bed of clearly rationalized work processes and, as we all know from calling 800 numbers, very well-defined scripts.

2). The reintegrated tasks are recombined into a more fluid and more global division of labor that not only separates the head of, say, Wall Street from the hands of Mexico, but the words of workers in Iowa from those in India.

3). Control and coordination of redistributed and redivided labor can be connected through the infrastructure of Internet technology and the base of software which has been designed to support it.

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I want to be very clear with you that I am not romanticizing my long-lost days as a programmer or fantasizing about some wizardry of technology that is, as if by capital's unified design, able to bring about all of this. In fact, the history of information system development in the last twenty-five years has in many cases been a comedy of errors, in which technological design and management dictates have made Chaplin's "Modern Times" seem like middle of the night reruns.

Harry Braverman was writing in the first part of the 1970s, when mainframe computers and tedious computer programming were the only technical means to integrate office labor processes. The guiding principle for developing computer system specifications at that time was that of *automation,* which was borrowed from factory-based systems and built on the idea that office work could be made to flow as if it were an assembly line of paper.

During the 1980s popular management literature got led down a garden path of belief in so-called "paperless offices" and computers which were tagged with the supposedly fond-sounding name "personal." By the accounts written in management literature during this period, the effects were disastrous, and as the 1984 Office of Technology Assessment report indicated (and Fortune magazine reiterated in 1986), management again had to take a look at work organization, which had to be reconfigured before office automation could be effective.

Current information systems are designed under the rubric of "communication" rather than automation. This overall metaphor acknowledges that information doesn't necessarily flow, but needs to be communicated from person to person and place to place. High on the list of things that get written into information systems specifications are the need for management to examine what they call work organization with a careful eye toward coordinating and controlling work processes through technical specification. Without too much translation we can hear this process when we listen to Braverman in 1974:

> Machinery offers to management the opportunity to do by wholly mechanical means that which it had previously attempted to do by organizational and disciplinary means. The fact that many machines may be paced and controlled according to centralized decisions, and that these controls may thus be in the hands of management, removed from the site of production to the office—these technical possibilities are of just as great

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interest to management as the fact that the machine multiplies the productivity of labor. (195)

If we strip away the spin words used today like "knowledge" worker, "flexible" work, and "high tech" work, and if we insert the word "information system" for "machinery," we are still talking about management attempts to control and coordinate labor processes.

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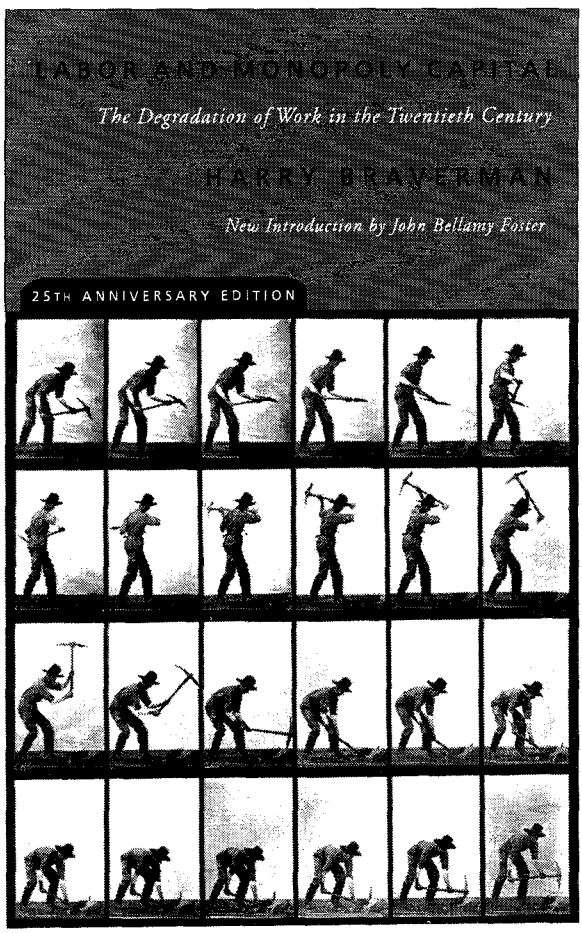
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BEFORE BRAVERMAN: HARRY FRANKEL AND THE AMERICAN WORKERS' MOVEMENT

by BRYAN PALMER

What was so great about Harry Braverman? The question, obviously rhetorical, elicits a predictable response in academic circles, where the author of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) is deservedly praised for a text that literally christened the emerging field of labor process studies.[1] Braverman's book was rigorous in its conceptualizations, sufficiently abstract to present an argument that reached beyond particularities into generalized, universal experience, and historical and empirical enough to sustain an analysis meant to be received across disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, it bridged the academic and activist worlds of left scholarship and practice, a breeze of fresh, interpretive air that reinvigorated intellectual sensibilities and revived the study of the work process in fields such as history, sociology, economics, political science, and human geography. One of the fifty or so most important studies produced in the third quarter of the twentieth century, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* earned its author a remarkable reputation that, sadly, he never lived to enjoy.[2]

Authors of great books, having scored the music which rings in the collective ear of generations of readers, inevitably face a cacophony of criticism, some very good, some quite indifferent, and some irritatingly bad. Braverman soon faced an avalanche of revisionist study, much of which was written to

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displace his analysis by showing that somewhere, somehow, some group's historical engagement with the work process stepped outside the general boundaries developed in *Labor and Monopoly Capital.* In the end, such studies remain, for the most part, mere footnotes to the edifice of labor process studies, the foundation of which has been, for almost a quarter century, Braverman's book. Written by the director of a small, independent, left press, Monthly Review, by an author with next to no university training and no disciplinary, scholastic axe to grind, consciously scaffolded on an argument that generalized capitalist experience in order to better sustain the perspectives needed to build a socialist society, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was, and remains, a deep irony. As a powerfully influential academic text that made its mark on tens of thousands of students and instructors, Braverman's book made an intellectual splash and has remained an important study used in many classrooms and read widely outside the university. Yet it would almost certainly have been rejected by any university press to which it was submitted in the early 1970s.

My task is thus a modest one, rooted in humility and respect for what Harry Braverman was, and what he accomplished. I cannot lecture anyone on any theme that even gestures toward the pretense of going 'beyond Braverman.' And I have no inclination of suggesting some deep structure of interpretive reciprocity, in which exercises in textuality will bring Braverman into line with the fashionable 'critical theory' icons of our time. My purpose is much more mundane, embarrassingly so, since it is not particularly theoretical at all, but is, rather, unashamedly political. I want to address what was great about Harry Braverman. And to do that I offer only a sketch of a life 'before Braverman,' commenting on a man some will know as Harry Frankel.

Harry Braverman, like so many of his generation, came to radicalism in the Great Depression. "Socialism and Marxism were in the air," he recalled forty years later, "Capitalism was putting on a pretty bad performance."[3] Born in 1920, the son of a shoeworker, he aspired to a college education, but the pinch of hard times and the pressures on the family economy forced his father to terminate his enrolment in Brooklyn College after one brief year. As Irving Howe and a host of others have suggested, the New York public college scene was perhaps the

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nation's most fertile seedbed of radical ideas in the 1930s,[4] but Braverman ended up in a particular current of the oppositional stream. His choice was to be a minority within a minority, and he aligned himself not with the popular frontist Communist Party, but with the Young People's Socialist League.[5]

The Yipsels were a rare phenomenon: associated with the Socialist Party, they were nevertheless an almost autonomous entity, much more than the youth wing of the older, established party apparatus. Having gone through a series of radicalizations and reorganizations, including voting to join the communist movement in 1919, the Yipsels were in particular motion in the mid-to-late 1930s. Led by the iconoclastic agitational firebrand Albert Weisbord in the early 1920s, the YPSL lost their leader to the CP and their political moorings in the populist-progressive presidential bid of Robert LaFollette. After 1924 they were virtually moribund. But with the revival of the Socialist Party in the 1932 electoral bid of Norman Thomas, the YPSL reemerged as a vital, youthful player in socialist politics, throwing its growing membership ranks behind movements of the unemployed and supporting the growth of militancy and organization in the labor movement.

The Greater New York area was the center of YPSL strength as several thousand radical youth galvanized the Socialist Party, pushing the entrenched, often foreign-born leadership, dubbed 'the Old Guard,' back into the fray. There they faced off against their communist counterparts who, by 1935, had gravitated from their ultra-left sectarianism of the Third Period (1929-1935) to the 'Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism' of Browder's Popular Front.[6] It was the Yipsels, known as Norman Thomas's 'Militants,' who most vociferously challenged the politics of Stalinism's sordid compromises with bourgeois power in this period, just as it was the Yipsels who stood firm for socialist internationalism in their defence of a revolutionary perspective on the Spanish Civil War, their uncompromising support for labor's upsurge (evident not only in the 1934 General Strikes in Toledo, Minneapolis, and San Francisco,[7] but also in the general struggle to build the CIO). In their refusal to paper over Stalinist deformations in the Soviet Union, most evident in the Dewey hearings exonerating Trotsky (held in Mexico but much debated in New York and elsewhere in 1937), the Yipsels also maintained revolutionary principle in the face

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of much opposition.[8] In such a climate it was not surprising that the YPSL was a major recruiting ground for the small but dedicated band of Trotskyists (headed by James Cannon, Max Shachtman, and Martin Abern) who led a disciplined contingent of left oppositionists into a fusion with A. J. Muste's American Workers Party, and then charted entry into the Socialist Party. The left-leaning Yipsels found themselves ostracized from their own organization, and were denied credentials at the 1937 Socialist Party Convention. Soon after, many would gravitate to the first Trotskyist party in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party, whose founding convention was held in 1938.

A mere teenager, Harry Braverman was one of the Yipsels won to Trotskyism in this period. To support himself and his politics, he apprenticed at the Brooklyn Naval Yards from 1937-1941, where he learned the trade of coppersmith and branched out into steel-fabricating layout man, an occupation he would master to the point that he was soon supervising a team of 18-20 workers refitting the asbestos-covered pipes of docked ships (a critical contributing factor in his premature death). It was in this period that he solidified his relationship with his wife Miriam, also a Trotskyist in the SWP. Drafted by the army in 1944-1945, Harry was sent to Cheyenne, Wyoming, where he transferred his skills to locomotive piping and, with the end of hostilities (Miriam having been posted to Akron by the SWP), the Bravermans finally set up a common household in Youngstown, Ohio. There they lived from 1946-1951, developing close ties to a talented contingent of midwestern proletarian activists, among them Bert Cochran and Jules Geller; parenting a son; and fending off the red-baiting houndings of the FBI, who managed to have Harry fired from his job at Republic Steel, but failed in their similiar efforts at the Pollack blast furnace operations.

Braverman was thus, by the mid-1940s, a steeled dissident communist, formed at the interface of the Great Depression's debilitating poverty and the material context of working-class deprivation in America, Trotskyism's oppositional challenge to both capitalist exploitation and Stalinism's political deformations,[9] and a deep training in the skilled trades of the most advanced sectors of the monopolistic workplace. As a committed communist, moreover, Braverman had already experienced

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the prelude to McCarthyism. Eighteen of the SWP's leaders were imprisoned late in the War, the first victims of the notorious Smith Act, which made it a crime of treason to publish and proclaim the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky. Like so many of his comrades who, in their routine waged labors and political involvements, might amass an FBI file of 3,000 pages or more, Braverman experienced firsthand the intrusively threatening anti-communism of the state. This was the parentage of Harry Frankel, the party name Braverman adopted on joining the SWP.

The Trotskyist milieu that shaped Frankel was a unique political formation. Unlike the politics of Stalinism, where slavish adherence to Comintern dictate and blind obedience to the favored party leadership of the moment were hallmarks of Communist Party practice, the Trotskyism of the Socialist Workers Party was an ongoing debate and discussion over tactics and strategy within the newly formed Fourth International, within which the American section was a source of strength and material resources. Frankel, after a brief two and a half years in the movement, faced the critically important faction fight of 1939-1940. James Burnham and Max Shachtman led an assault on the fundamental Trotskyist defense of the Soviet Union. Unlike most of the Yipsel New York youth, who followed Shachtman out of the SWP and into the Workers' Party, Frankel stuck with the SWP leadership and party head, James P. Cannon.[10] He would later remember Cannon, after many years of political separation, as a principled defender of what the Soviet Union had once been, a native voice of the historic significance of the Russian Revolution and its central importance for the U. S. working class. Frankel was soon elected to the New York-based National Committee of the Party, embroiled in controversies associated with how the SWP handled the repression of the Second World War years, aligning with George Novack, George Clarke, and Morris Stein in a 1942 questioning of Cannon, Albert Goldman and others in the national leadership.[11]

The "young Harry," as he was affectionately known in the inner circles of the party, was nevertheless a staunch SWP loyalist, assailing 'renegades' such as Lewis Corey and denouncing party enemies like Shachtman as "a petty bourgeois counterfeit" in a blunt, rather sanctimonious review that earned him the condemnation of James T. Farrell and the praise of the jailed

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Cannon. Cannon held up Frankel as a pillar of Marxist polemical engagement, his article an example of the "critical and independent thinking which we recommend to all comrades, especially the youth ... we appreciate the *tone* of the article. That is the *right* way to write about renegades and charlatans."[12]

One of Frankel's close allies in the Yipsels had warned Harry that to side with Cannon in the 1939-1940 faction fight would seal his political fate: he would never be much more than a "wheelhorse" to the 'Irish politician' who ran the SWP.[13] Frankel rejected this assessment, but undoubtedly there were those in the dissident communist movement of the 1940s who saw Harry as merely one more Cannonite hack. As another faction fight brewed in the mid-1940s, coming to a head with the exit of the Goldman-Morrow group from the SWP, questions of Marxist philosophical method (dialectical materialism), the nature of the Soviet workers' state, and the relationship of a native American bolshevik organization to both Stalinism and Shachtman's Workers' Party blurred into a growing minority critique of the SWP as a cult organization, top-heavy in its bureaucratized isolation from the currents of world politics and the possibilities of mass socialist work in the United States.[14]

If Frankel, now immersed in the daily politics of his Youngstown work, as well as a valued element of the proletarianized, midwestern wing of the SWP, remained somewhat outside the fray in the Goldman-Morrow battle, which was centered in New York and Chicago, there were subtle signs that he was finding the climate of what he would later refer to benevolently as "small group politics in the American socialist movement" constrainingly sectarian.[15] His writings for the party theoretical press moved, in this period, away from scathing personally-directed polemics, towards broad-ranging, *historically* scaffolded analyses of the class foundations of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American society. The Marxist bite in Frankel's public presentations remained, evident in his conclusion to a challenging analysis of the Jacksonian era:

> If Jacksonianism has any 'modern significance' it is this: only by allying themselves with an economically predominant class on the road to power can the urban and agrarian petty-bourgeois masses break the capitalist chains that bind them. That modern class, which is the gravedigger of capitalism, is the proletariat. Marxists will work to build the power of this class and to gain for it allies from other classes. We leave empty-headed liberals to celebrate the reactionary subservience of the popular move-

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ment to the slaveholding class a century ago, as they celebrated the subservience to the capitalist-Roosevelt demagogy more recently.[16]

Frankel's concerns thus moved, over the course of the 1940s, away from denunciations of party opponents to sophisticated, challenging interpretations of the materialist conception of American history, in which he situated his accounts polemically in terms of the existing historiography, from Frederick Jackson Turner through Charles Beard to Richard Hofstadter. His movement in this direction was facilitated by the immensely invigorating and intellectually challenging program of Marxist study offered periodically to promising comrades in the SWP's Trotsky School. This party-funded opportunity enabled select figures, of whom Frankel was one, to study philosophy and history in a disciplined six-month daily course of interrogation, in which the methods and development of the revolutionary movement and U.S. class formation were principal subjects of concern. In the process of this interpretive engagement, and in the increasingly closed climate of McCarthyite America, Frankel's politics shifted gears, and he began to question the nature of the SWP and its leadership, especially his political mentor, James Cannon.

By the late 1940s, with the Cold War enveloping the politics of permanent revolution from many quarters, Cannon and the SWP found it difficult to maintain the prospects of an American Revolution and sustain their international prominence in the world Trotskyist movement. One part of this was perhaps Cannon's early deference to European theorists such as Ernest Mandel (Germaine), with whom he often clashed tactically, but who seemed more adept at charting the increasingly convoluted conceptual waters of Eastern Europe's post-Second World War 'Baltic Sea' of deformed workers' state buffer zones, from Yugoslavia to Poland; Germaine and others were also more obviously at home in the theoretically-charged atmosphere of the traditional European revolutionary left. But another part of the difficult context of the late 1940s was the pressured push, in times of acute reaction, away from the revolutionary politics of principle which Frankel had found so attractive in Cannon. As the 'American Century' closed in around U.S. revolutionaries, one wall pressing in the intensely coercive containments of a rabid anti-communism, the other squeezing Marxist commitment with the promise of affluence and the pacification of an

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increasingly bureaucratized trade union movement, the broad left appeared trapped in its own shrinking space. Small wonder that the SWP experienced international pressure to align with supposedly like-minded adherents of fragments of Trotskyism's program, and that there was even concerted effort to construct an alliance with the beleaguered Stalinist milieu.

Cannon's leadership in the SWP faced a series of challenges as the brilliantly eclectic Caribbean Marxist C.L.R. James and Trotsky's former secretary Raya Dunayevskya forged the Forest-Johnson tendency and moved in and out of the SWP over the course of the late 1940s and early 1950s. They brought with them their politics of 'third campism' in which the Soviet Union was depicted as 'state capitalist,' a hair-splitting differentiation that separated itself from Shachtman's perspective of Soviet 'bureaucratic collectivism.'[17] A symbolic blow was struck when Trotsky's widow, Natalia Sedova, abandoned orthodox Trotskyist postions and embraced Shachtman and the Workers' Party. On the international scene, new waves of revisionist accommodation were being charted by the enigmatic Michel Pablo, an exotic figure of international intrigue who would face imprisonment by Dutch authorities in the 1960s before finding a home as a political adviser to Ben Bella, leader of the Algerian Liberation Front and eventual head of the post-colonial northern African state. In a nutshell, Pablo's early 1950s position boiled down to an acknowledgement that, for generations to come, the key forces in the contest for world socialism would inevitably be the revived capitalism of the post-war world and the Stalinist formations of mid-century. All that was possible for the small forces of the Fourth International was to lend what little weight they had to the long centuries of 'degenerate workers' states' that might lay in the future, pressuring Stalinism and neo-colonialist mobilizations toward some kind of rapproachment with revolutionary politics.[18]

In the United States this new configuration of politics emerged most clearly in a complex bloc of SWP oppositionists headed by Bert Cochran. A talented figure who bridged the proletarian and theoretical wings of the party, Cochran's writings under the pseudonym E.R. Frank were a mainstay of the *Fourth International*'s coverage of events in Europe. His longstanding trade union work in the auto sectors of Michigan and Ohio made him a pivotal player in the SWP's industrial poli-

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tics.[19] By 1951-1952, Cochran had lined up with George Clarke, Mike Bartell, and Harry Frankel, pushing within the National Committee of the SWP for a reorientation of the Trotskyist party's relationship with the Stalinist milieu, as well as a broad reconsideration of Trotskyism's approach to trade union and mass work. As factions hardened, the debate within the SWP grew more acrimonious, coming to a head at a May 1953 Plenum. Much was at stake in what was undoubtedly a complicated political situation, exacerbated by the worsening fortunes of an American revolutionary organization enmeshed in the ugly coercions of McCarthyism. For Cannon and others nothing less than the survival of the Trotskyist party was at stake, while for Cochran and Frankel the issue was one of bureaucratized cliquism and Stalinophobia,[20] forces that insulated an ossified politics from any possibility of contact with the larger radical milieu or the masses of potentially militant workers.

The language of debate was rancorous and often personalized, and if Frankel contributed some of the most penetrating political commentary he also gave as good as he got in vituperative dismissal. Jean Tussey, an unaligned Ohio-based SWP activist, recalls pressing Frankel on what was wrong with the party's program and orientation. All she could get was the repeated exclamation, "Cannon is a son of a bitch!" The Cochran-Frankel minority lost the political fight at the May Plenum, a supposed truce (on bolshevik principles of democratic centralism and minority representation) was worked out, and it appeared, for a brief moment, that some possibility of reconciliation within the SWP factions was possible. Within months, however, the pact was breaking down, and eventually Cochran, Frankel, and others were expelled in November 1953, charged with disloyally having refused party assignments and boycotting a major SWP function, the 25th Anniversary celebration of the Trotskyist newspaper *The Militant*, instead organizing a counter-meeting. The rhetorical bombast of the expulsion exceeded anything that had developed out of past schisms, splits, and factional suspensions.[21]

In the aftermath of the Cochran-Frankel expulsion, Harry Frankel lived on for a time. Cochran and Frankel founded the Socialist Union of America, and their first propaganda organ was *The Educator*, a mimeographed sheet whose title was borrowed from the 1930s publication of the Mechanics Educa-

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tional Society of America, a forerunner of the UAW with which Cochran had worked in his early auto organizing days. Frankel penned an initial article on sectarianism and splinter groups in the Trotskyist milieu, but within a year Frankel as a figure in the American workers' movement had passed from the scene.

Harry Braverman reemerged as the co-editor, with Cochran, of the *American Socialist*, and leading spokesman of what purported to be a new politics of socialist clarity, in which the cancer of sectarianism would be excised from the left. Braverman and Cochran proposed to spread socialist propaganda that was comprehensible and liberated from jargon and ossified orthodoxies, strengthening ties to the union and progressive movements the better to lay the foundations for the future birth of a socialist Marxist party. In a 1954 speech, "Setting a New Course," Braverman pilloried the SWP as an isolated sect, trapped in fulfiling the obligatory "moral action undertaken as a push-button response to an immutable law." Trotskyist theory, he suggested, had died in 1940, failing to move beyond its hardened formulae. Like all sectarians, Braverman argued, the SWP did not want to learn from the masses, merging with the struggles and experiences of the working class, but to swallow them.

Cochran and Braverman proposed that their socialist group and its paper would be different, precisely because they offerred no program and no agitational agenda. Their publications would be guided by the interest in particular subjects that existed beyond their ranks, and they would purport to have no answers, but simply provide readers with a perch from which they could develop perspective and information. "All of our material, with occasional necessary exceptions," proclaimed Braverman, "tries to indicate a course of action, but we aren't agitating anybody, because we don't see anybody around who is interested in being agitated or ready for it." This was a long way from "the young Harry" of the early 1940s, a veritable antithesis of the Leninist-Trotskyist approach that had animated the Frankel of the Socialist Workers Party.[22]

Ironically, if predictably, this experiment in non-agitational agitation came to a relatively abrupt end, with Braverman eventually reaching the conclusion that Cochran's Walter Lippman-like politics of eclectic propaganda were actually losing sight of anything resembling a socialist purpose. The two participated

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in a Cochran-edited Monthly Review publication, *American Labor in Mid-Passage* (1959), that no doubt moved Braverman closer toward Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, paving the way toward his eventual affiliation with the press that would publish *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.[23] But *American Socialist* ceased publication after a five-year run, well before the upheavals of the 1960s that, in some senses, it had been awaiting.

Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was, at this point, some fourteen years from publication. But it would be written by a man of socialist conviction and learned cultured sensibility, a socialist who knew the price the American working class had paid for its labors in the factories of capitalist accumulation and who understood what it meant to give one's life to the struggle for social transformation. Before Braverman, there was 'the young Harry,' the Frankel of Marxist perspective and party discipline. Revolutionaries, unlike conservatives, honor the ideas and ideals of their early years. Harry Frankel was, like so many others of his youthful Depression-decade generation, the best that the American working class had ever produced. He was one of those 1930s radicals, moreover, whom Stalinism could not capture and then squander. Against the raw exploitation of capitalism's marketplace, in the face of the repressive incursions of the state, and in opposition to the blandishments of acquisitive individualism or the road of Stalinist disillusionment, the young Frankel chose the life of the dissident communist. His training in a period of political ferment made him what he was; as a Yipsel 'Militant' and Trotskyist recruit of rare conviction, he carried the values and vision of his formative years forward into his mid-life period of intellectual labor. He educated himself, with the help of other Marxists and their struggling party, to be the educator and he gave to his class the best years and cherished enthusiasm of his youth. Later, we would be fortunate indeed that Braverman would bestow on us the gift of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, a book written out of the passions and workplace/political practice of the younger Harry Frankel.

What we really need, in the 1990s, however, is what Frankel/Braverman could not will into existence: the reproduction of his generation of working-class communists, a contingent of young proletarian revolutionaries dedicated to the pursuit of socialism. Men and women like these knew, as so

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many in our times do not, that "Those who cannot defend old positions will never conquer new ones."[24] They knew—their lives a constant contest to create a way forward out of capitalist barbarism—that the degradation of labor was the protracted undoing of humanity, but they grasped as well that in the contradictions of this process lay history's only hope. Braverman wrote the central passage of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, but it was Harry Frankel who kept its insights foremost in the Monthly Review author's mind:

> The apparent acclimatization of the worker to the new modes of production grows out of the destruction of all other ways of living, the striking of wage bargains that permit a certain enlargement of the customary bounds of subsistence for the working class, the weaving of the net of modern capitalist life that finally makes all other modes of living impossible. But beneath this apparent habituation, the hostility of workers to the degenerated forms of work which are forced upon them continues as a subterranean stream that makes its way to the surface when employment conditions permit, or when the capitalist drive for a greater intensity of labor oversteps the bounds of physical and mental capacity. It renews itself in new generations, expresses itself in the unbounded cynicism and revulsion which large numbers of workers feel about their work, and comes to the fore repeatedly as a social issue demanding solution.[25]

This is, to be sure, an old set of ideas, a constellation of Marxist thought that some have, in the unparalleled confluence of arrogance and complacency that often masquerades as 'critical theory' in the late twentieth-century years postdating Braverman's text, constructed as an antiquarian attachment, risible in its sympathies and sensitivity. Scholastic hyperbole notwithstanding, such apparently laughable thought is the premise of a politics of social transformation, and however many new positions we may be justifiably exhorted to embrace, none are achievable if the old positions of the young Harry Frankel are not defended and deepened.

NOTES

1. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1974).
2. Brief comment on Braverman can be found in Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 298; George Breitman, "Harry Braverman: Marxist Author," *The Militant*, 27 August 1976, p. 12.
3. Quoted in Jack Barnes, ed., *James P. Cannon as We Knew Him: By Thirty-three Comrades, Friends, and Relatives* (New York: Pathfinder, 1976), pp. 203-204.
4. Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), pp. 61-89.

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5. On the Yipsels see Paul Buhle, "Young People's Socialist League," in Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakis, ed., *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 875-877; Irving Howe, *Socialism in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985), pp. 49-86; Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the 'American Century'* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), pp. 68-105.
6. For a sample of perspectives see Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (New York: Praeger, 1962); Michael Goldfield, "Recent Historiography of the Communist Party, USA," in Mike Davis, Fred Pfeil, Michael Sprinker, ed., *The Year Left: An American Socialist Yearbook, 1985* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 315-356.
7. Brief discussions are in Art Preiss, *Labor's Giant Step: Twenty Years of the CIO* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1964), pp. 19-33; James P. Cannon, *Notebook of an Agitator* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), pp. 75-126.
8. Christopher Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), esp. pp. 140-197; Felix Morrow, *Revolution & Counter-Revolution in Spain* (New York: Pathfinder, 1974); Pierre Frank, *The Fourth International: The Long March of the Trotskyists* (London: Links, 1979).
9. For an informed recent account of the Trotskyist-Stalinist relation see Murray E.G. Smith, "Revisiting Trotsky: Reflections on the Stalinist Debacle and Trotskyism as Alternative," *Rethinking Marxism* 9 (Fall 1996-1997), pp. 40-67.
10. For introductions to this defining factional struggle see, from the SWP side, Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism* (New York, Pathfinder, 1973); James P. Cannon, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (New York, Pathfinder, 1972). From the Workers' Party perspective see Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the 'American Century'* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), pp. 106-184; Mordecai Donald Bubis, "The Soviet Union and Stalinism in the Ideological Debates of American Trotskyism (1937-1951)," PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1985.
11. For this period see James P. Cannon, *Socialism on Trial* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970); James P. Cannon, *The Socialist Workers Party in World War II: Writings and Speeches, 1940-1943* (New York: Pathfinder, 1975).
12. See Harry Frankel, "The Renegades: Lewis Corey," *Fourth International*, 4 (January 1943), pp. 27-29; "A Defamer of Marxism," *Fourth International*, V (May 1944), pp. 149-152; Alan M. Wald, *James T. Farrell: The Revolutionary Socialist Years* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 126-127; James P. Cannon, *Letters from Prison* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), pp. 141-144.
13. *James P. Cannon as We Knew Him*, p. 205.
14. For Cannon's writings on this period see James P. Cannon, *The Struggle for Socialism in the 'American Century': Writings and Speeches, 1945-1947 (New York: Pathfinder, 1977).*
15. *James P. Cannon as We Knew Him*, p. 206.
16. Harry Frankel, "Three Concepts of Jacksonianism," *Fourth International, 8* (March 1946), pp. 93-96. Other Frankel *Fourth International* articles preceding this account include *"Class Forces in the American Revolution,"* 7 (March 1946), pp. 89-93; *"How the Constitution was Written,"* 7 (April 1946), pp. 118-121; *"The Jackson Period in American History,"* 7 (December 1946), pp. 365-368.
17. Johnson-Forest, "State Capitalism and World Revolution," *SWP Internal Bulletin No. 4,* September 1950; Max Shachtman, *The Bureaucratic Revolution: The Rise of the Stalinist State* (New York: Donald Press, 1962)
18. A collection of documents that provides a perspective on this context is Cliff Slaughter, ed., *Trotskyism versus Revisionism: A Documentary History: Volume 1: The Fight against Pabloism in the Fourth International* (London: New Park, 1974). Note as well "Against Pabloist Revisionism," *Fourth International, 14* (September-October 1953); Socialist Workers Party, *International Information Bulletin*, "The 12th Plenum of the IEC," January 1953, which contains Pablo's "Report on the Evolution of the World Situation since the Third World Congress," pp. 2-19.

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19. On Cochran see E.R. Frank (Cochran) Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University, New York, NY.
20. The Cochran-Frankel position found the SWP approach to Stalinism's victimization during the McCarthy period inadequate. For the official SWP approach see "The Capitalist Witch-hunt and How to Fight It: Resolution of the SWP National Committee, February 1950," SWP, *Education for Socialists,* July 1968.
21. See Slaughter, ed., *Trotskyism versus Revisionism;* James P. Cannon, *Speeches to the Party: The Revolutionary Prespective and the Revolutionary Party* (New York: Pathfinder, 1953); Bryan Palmer interview with Jean Tussey, Cleveland, 14 May 1995; Wald, *The New York Intellectuals,* pp. 298-300. A proliferation of position papers and internal party documents and corresponence outlines various positions. See, for instance, James P. Cannon Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, Boxes 48,49, and 50; Socialist Workers Party Records, 1928-1955, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, Microfilm Reels 6, 7, 18, and 19; Mike Bartell, "The New York Local—Report and Tasks," *Internal Bulletin,* 15/1 (February 1953), pp. 1-10; Bartell, "The Struggle in the New York Local," *Internal Bulletin,* 15/2 (February 1953), pp. 1-25; Lou S., "Opponent Work Report," *Internal Bulletin,* No. 5 NY Local Pre-Convention Discussion, 18 March 1953; Joyce Cowley, "Remarks Made on Floor of Downtown Branch Meeting—January 29," *Internal Bulletin,* No. 4 NY Local Pre-Convention Discussion, 21 March 1953; Hansen and Frankel Exchange, *Internal Bulletin,* 15/4, February 1953.
22. Copies of *The Educator* containing Frankel/Braverman articles are in the Cochran Papers, Tamiment Library. See especially Harry Frankel, "The Marcy and Vern Groups," *The Educator,* 1/1 (December 1953), pp. 16-27; Harry Braverman, "Setting a New Course," *The Educator,* 1/4 (June 1954), pp. 1-15.
23. See Harry Braverman, "Labor and Politics," in Bert Cochran, ed., *American Labor in Mid-Passage* (New York: Monthly Review, 1959), pp. 99-112.
24. Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), p. 178.
25. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital,* p. 151.

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BOOKS

An Asian-American Tale

by Paul Buhle

Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography.* Foreword by Ossie Davis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 344 pp., $19.95, paper.

In a confession unusual for our age, neoconservative savant Nathan Glazer recently admitted that he and his colleagues had been terribly wrong about race in the United States. In the definitive popular text for meritocracy, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1969), Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan described or rather prescribed a successful American pluralism that only the weak and unwilling resisted. Thirty years later, with racial divides of wealth, education, and life chances impressively solid (notwithstanding the emergence of a nonwhite middle class), Moynihan, Daniel Bell, Norman Podhoretz and the rest of the crowd have long since hardened into modern day Social Darwinists. Still skeptical about massive government programs for affirmative action, Glazer wonders aloud: wasn't there another solution?

Grace Lee Boggs has known the answer all along, but not one that the Cold War liberals (later neoconservatives) were likely to adopt. It was not the Russian-style Communism that they claimed the American left was threatening to deliver, not the guaranteed annual wage nor the full employment that leftish liberals proposed from the 1940s to the 1970s, but an egalitarian society with the old-fashioned name of socialism.

Grace Boggs found her own way to this conclusion and has continued finding new ways, outside the more familiar socialist or

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communist paths. A large part of the pleasure of reading *Living For Change* is the recollection of this *sui generis* experience. Daughter of a prominent Asian-American restauranteur, growing up in Providence, Rhode Island and later New York, Grace Lee enjoyed the family's prominence but also began to experience discrimination and a degree of social isolation. Her father, a domestic tyrant of sorts, nurtured dreams of rebuilding his home village and welcomed Mao's programs. Her mother, rebellious in small ways, offered a role model for women's independent-mindedness.

Grace entered Barnard College in 1931. Just sixteen and intellectually precocious from her own wide reading, she was one of three Asians (or people of any color) on campus. The Depression crisis prompted her turn inward to philosophy, and she pursued that determinedly in graduate studies at Bryn Mawr. There she found Kant and Hegel, writing a dissertation on the American pragmatist George Herbert Mead. Any hope of a professorship out for an Asian-American woman, Lee pondered her status. As Hitler took France, she determined to move as far away from a collapsed Europe as she could: Chicago.

There, working at the University of Chicago's philosophy library for $10 per week, she engaged in politics for the first time. Joining the little Workers Party at a historic moment when the Communist Party had isolated itself by supporting the Hitler-Stalin Pact, she emerged, thanks to A. Philip Randolph's March On Washington (MOW) movement, something of a public orator. Randolph called off the march after President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, banning discrimination in the defense industry, but the political victory heightened Lee's sense of the possible. As she looks back at that moment, she decided then to become an activist within the African-American community.

For the next period, though, she became quite unexpectedly one of a very small handful of Asian-American Marxist theorists in that age. (The others, like Japanese-American West Coast activist Karl Yoneda, were essentially Communist newspaper-editors; none were women.) She modestly attributes this development to meeting Marxist spellbinder, dialectician and Pan African activist C.L.R. James, then on tour in Chicago for the Workers Party. Eagerly, she moved to New York, working at her father's restaurant or being a secretary while reading Lenin and Amy Jacques Garvey, and meeting the likes of Richard Wright and famed dancer Katharine Dunham. Excited by the emerging black struggle as part of a reinvigorated class

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movement, she translated several of the essays of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* into English for the first time. These, along with her comrade Raya Dunayevskaya's translations of Lenin's notebooks on Hegel, constituted the ballast for a unique perspective on Marxism.

The political theories worked out had, in retrospect, more significance to the members of the little group (called the "Johnson-Forest Tendency" after the "Party names" of James and Dunayevskaya) than to the world at large. A booming postwar consumerism, ferocious political repression, the many side-effects of the Cold War, and the racial divisions within the working class neutralized the seemingly explosive possibilities. Yet Lee and her comrades foreshadowed the New Left in a number of important ways, including an emphasis upon the newer rebellious impulses of young people and women.

Lee herself moved to Detroit in 1953, married black auto worker James Boggs, and commenced a life of unceasing local activism. Much of the rest of *Living For Change* settles into a detailed description of personal life that defies summarization, but offers a rewarding, intimate study of ideas and activities in the cauldron of race and class contradictions during the 1950s-1990s. I remember once calling Detroit information without Grace's home address and the telephone operator exclaiming, "You mean Grace Boggs!" It is no exaggeration to say that tens of thousands of Detroiters regarded the couple as perennially scrappy but beloved members of an extended family.

In some ways the story is heartbreaking. The group around C.L.R. James disintegrated and one by one, the Boggses broke with their erstwhile comrades over personal and political differences. The early promise of the civil rights movement, which so roused black Detroit and the Boggs' supporters, was stifled by the waves of massively destructive "urban renewal," suburbanization and plant closings, bringing increased poverty and despair. New organizations, like the groupings around the Manifesto for a Black Political Party and their own National Organization for an American Revolution, failed after making a contribution to educating young (especially black) radicals through pamphlets, study groups and endless personal appearances by the two at conferences. In the end, as once-radical mayor Coleman Young bowed to the corporations to keep Detroit afloat, and the black middle class followed whites in abandoning the

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inner city, the Boggses with the rest of the Left were outgunned, bypassed by the postindustrial recklessness of capitalism.

But Grace Lee Boggs was never one to be kept down by mere defeats. As memorable volumes by James Boggs for MR Press pushed beyond received truths to creative adaptation—sometimes right, sometimes wrong, but always creative—Grace found new ways to make herself useful.[1] Identifying with the black community for decades, she emerged during the 1970s-1980s as a public speaker and intimate advisor for (and to) Asian-American Studies. Meanwhile, she joined with other community activists in new coalitions against drugs, violence, and casino-gambling in Detroit, among many other causes. Ossie Davis catches the spirit when he says about her story, "Here is a book for the hungering heart, or even a picnic."

With Grace Lee Boggs, it could not be otherwise.

NOTES

1. See James Boggs, *Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963); *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

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A Black Rosie the Riveter from a Red Perspective

by Jack Weston

Alexander Saxton, *Bright Web in the Darkness.* Afterword by Tillie Olsen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 331 pp., $12.95.

Saxton writes about work and workers' fights for a better life. He wrote a brilliant novel about wartime railroad workers and their families in Chicago, *The Great Midland* (see my review *MR*, vol. 49, no. 4) and here maybe even a better one about wartime welders in the shipyards of San Francisco Bay. Born to the elite Exeter-Harvard track, Saxton became radicalized during the Depression and joined the working class and the Communist Party in southside Chicago. (His first novel, *Grand Crossing* (1943), tells the story of how he made this crossing in 1939.) After a hitch as a merchant seaman, he moved to California to work as a construction carpenter, a CP activist, and on the new novel here under review. Writing it was a ten-year after-hours grind, made harder by his fear of not getting a publisher if he was specific about the heroic CP work for blacks and women in the wartime maritime industry and the racist, sexist Shipbuilders' Union. But Saxton remained true to his version of free society and finished his novel in 1958—even if it earned him "less than a few months at carpenter wages."

His stubborn perseverance paid off in other ways, by producing not only the most accurate fictional history of the wartime labor struggles for equality in the Richmond Kaiser Shipyard and Bay Area neighborhoods, but a major novel in itself, the kind which draws the reader in to experience the action. And with Saxton's identifications

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in this new edition, we know at last the involvement of the CP in this important history.

We begin with Joyce Allen, the hero of the story, daughter of a railroad porter and schoolteacher, waiting for her first welding class, after a year away from her Nevada home working on the cleanup gang in a shipyard. In class she meets the Swedish-Finnish Sally Kallela, a waitress, daughter of an old Wobbly logger now building shipyards. Joyce moves into Sally's apartment, and together they help break the union-corporate barriers against blacks and women and become high-paid welders in the shipyard. This exciting struggle is the heart of the book.

Joyce is supported by a minister deeply devoted to his people and connected with the "Negro Improvement League," (Saxton's forced cover, now blown, for the historical CP) and "the Sergeant," an angry independent activist, a wounded vet who scorns the union and with great power builds worker solidarity from below (my favorite male character). Sally becomes a radical rank-and-file activist (historically, she joined the CP, but mum's the word about that in the 1950s) fighting with a strong core of others, including a wonderful old shipfitter (also a CPer), for a democratic union. Both the women have lovers: Joyce, an attractive student artist who soon leaves for the merchant marine; Sally, a hometown logger doing wood construction in the shipyards, who is unreliable and unworthy of her because he's without class-conscious principle, and soon joins the navy and serves as signalman on board a convoyed merchant ship. We join him on board and see some action, and thus gain a global perspective on the shipyard story. Finally, there's Walter Stone, the labor lawyer, who sells out the workers for the union officers because he's caught up in middle-class, professional, country-club social climbing, which cuts away at his youthful idealism. He's the only main character not of the working class and significantly the only lonely, sad, weak, defeated person. I think he's Saxton's triumphant portrait of himself as he would have been if he had not crossed over to the class.

Joyce, with her new high-paying job, can afford to renew her piano lessons, and the story ends with the star performance in her teacher's recital, with all her friends and relations in the concert hall audience. I wept unashamedly in joy of human fulfilment in struggle and art and hope and community (the "bright web") in spite of the powerful opposing social forces, the odds (the "darkness").

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The climax of the story comes with what the newspapers called "the three-hour strike." The Sergeant quietly organized it to protest the union's racist closed shop in defiance of FDR's Fair Employment Practices Committee's (FEPC) ruling. Hours before the end of the swing shift, a slim line of black welders, many of them women, lay down their tools and file past the gate claiming sickness and asking for early quit slips. Soon all the blacks have left and work stops in the yard. The crowd of workers outside argue about picketing the gate to keep the new shift out. Joyce hangs onto the neck of a union supporter to keep him from beating up her minister friend, who's there with the Improvement League (the CP) to keep things legal. The moderates prevail and the lights of the traveling cranes and the welding arcs begin to sparkle in the darkness. Joyce embraces and comforts the Sergeant, who wanted a shutdown; but the job action proves "they can't run this shipyard without us." And there's not a dry eye in the house.

There are several such scenes, all real and moving for us because they're mostly about political-economic issues, that is, about Saxton's central interest in class-race-gender struggle. We cheer when Sally slugs her boyfriend, "not scratching and biting as he always expected a girl would fight," after he insults and tries to own her; when she agrees to be the first woman member ever to speak at the local, if she doesn't "die of heart failure" (the occasion is a radical shopfloor (CP) resolution to support the FEPC's ruling against discrimination in the workplace); and when she walks out of a fancy restaurant in the middle of dinner, walks out on her groveling husband and their lawyer host, with just a "will you excuse me for a minute?" as she rises from the table and leaves for home at the instant she figures out that she is a guest of a rat fink.

In a darker, less gratifying mode, lawyer Stone, having decided to betray his lurking principles in the interests of money and position, visits the president of the Shipbuilders' Union to receive instructions on how blacks must be kept in their non-voting lodges, government rulings to the contrary. He gets instead a racist, red-baiting speech testing him for his pure-white closed-shop loyalties. He hears how, if you can't control membership, "you got no free union left, you got a Stalin-Hitler union"; how a "few commies in Washington" and a bunch of "pinks in the CIO" are behind the FEPC ruling; how radicals are passing resolutions in locals in support of the ruling and making "a big play for the women that never been in the union before and don't know any

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better"; how "there's some commies back of it too ... we got files on 'em"; how we fought hard for our union and we're not "goin' to stand around and see a bunch of wild niggers just out of the canebrakes come up here and smash it all to hell for us."

The scene shows not only how the Cold War was used against the good guys but (cunningly smuggled through Saxton's own self-censorship) the CP's support of them, the blacks and women and white rank and file for democracy.

Tillie Olsen, the famous CP and labor activist, early women's liberationist, and author of the enduring *Tell Me a Riddle* and *Yonnondio*, writes a long, brilliant afterword for this new edition. I urge all of her fans to read it. She's uniquely qualified by her working knowledge of the San Francisco labor movement (since the 1930s), by her practiced insights into how political novels are made, and by her friendship with Saxton since the early 1950s. She's eloquent about the early "American Inquisition," "The Time of the Toad" that took away many of labor's hard-won gains; that turned over accused reds to investigators, firings and (with their families) joblessness and poverty; that killed Saxton's second novel, made him falsify history in this one, and finally forced him (and although she doesn't say so—herself) to abandon writing fiction. She "cannot write without anger of that time."

Every reader will learn lessons about what is to be done in our own time of reaction and left reformations. I've learned to be alert to and resist a return of "The Great Fear," leading to a paranoid hunt for "the enemies of our country." On a personal level, I've learned from the example of fallen lawyer Stone, not to abandon my loyalty to and relations with the class, not just the proletariat but the poor, homeless, people of color, and women. And most of all, I've learned that the future achievement of our eternal hope will come from rank-and-file organizing for democracy in the workplaces and neighborhoods, not from unions and officials and authority. Class struggle is still the only way.

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Mass Movements Need Mass History

by J. Quinn Brisben

Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 746 pp., $30.

David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998), 738 pp., $29.95.

Several critics have complained that these books are too long, and they are door stoppers at over 750 pages each. I can imagine the groans of college students required to read them, although they are both well-structured and well-written. The tragic failure of American education can be symbolized by the fact that these books, although they are written in jargonless plain English, are beyond the capabilities of a majority of contemporary high school students. The greatest American mass movement of this century is treated, in text books and the hagiographic biographies which most teachers use to supplement them, as if great reforms were brought about by a few charismatic leaders, with most of the people involved serving only as extras in crowd scenes. As anyone who was a part of the civil rights movement can tell you, this is not so.

Taylor Branch is a native Southerner capable of achieving unusual rapport with the people who made the movement, as well as an insightful historian. David Halberstam is a skilled journalist who was an eyewitness to many of the events he describes, and who has deepened his understanding by keeping up with what has hap-

J. Quinn Brisben taught in inner-city Chicago high schools for many decades and has participated in most progressive social movements of the last four decades, including the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

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pened to many of those he once chronicled for the daily press. His book *The Children* is meant to stand alone, while Branch's current volume is the middle panel in a three-volume series about the King years. Their contrasting and supplementary approaches to their material illustrate two good ways of dealing with the complexities of recent history.

Branch's first volume, *Parting the Waters,* was notable for the insight it gave into the politics of black Baptist churches, and the dogged and persistent efforts of community activists, which finally began to get national attention with the Montgomery bus boycott. Vernon Johns, King's most important predecessor at Dexter Avenue Bapist Church, and the Pullman porter E.D. Nixon, who laid the groundwork for Rosa Parks' famous resistance, were major characters. Martin Luther King, Jr., was quite properly the central figure, but he was shown utilizing the contributions of thousands who were already in place and capable of independent action. It showed the strength of a people and their institutions, as well as the complexity of a time and place which does not easily fit into the schematic diagrams of social scientists.

The current volume, which deals with the impact of the Kennedy assassination; St. Augustine; the 1964 Civil Rights Act; Mississippi Freedom Summer; the growing shadow of Vietnam; and the eve of the Selma march, follows the same strategy. Malcolm X's rise to challenge King's vision, the notable contributions of the college students who began the sit-ins and took over the freedom rides, the contributions of Amzie Moore and the incredibly brilliant Robert P. Moses in the most resistant state of Mississippi, as well as hundreds of others, are given due coverage. The startling mixture of cold-war liberalism (which Branch mistakes for greatness) and vulgar egotism which characterized Lyndon Johnson is chronicled and analyzed. Use of the FBI files show that J. Edgar Hoover was even more malevolent than most of us realized at the time. However, the completeness of his files gives us a much more thorough picture of King's spiritual growth and his interaction with theologians like Rabbi Abraham Heschel than we would otherwise have.

Pillar of Fire contains a number of insights that previous historians of this era have failed to make. When Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, he correctly prophesied that he was delivering the South into the hands of the Republican Party for his lifetime. Many have been aware of the impact of Fannie Lou Hamer and the Missippi Freedom Democratic Party on the Democratic convention

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in Atlantic City in 1964, but few before Branch have underscored the Republican decertification of black Southern delegates at their San Francisco convention a few weeks earlier. Johnson defeated Goldwater in what amounted to a referendum on civil rights in 1964, but the Republican embrace of racism laid the groundwork for the eventual triumph of Nixon and Reagan in later elections.

Both of Branch's volumes, and Halberstam's book too, contain wonderful stories. Indeed, stories are the essence of movement history, and the movement was staffed largely by Southerners who are heirs to one of the world's great story-telling traditions. Anyone who has ever heard C.T. Vivian's account of his confrontation with Selma Sheriff Jim Clark, which ended with Clark breaking a bone in his hand on Vivian's skull, or E.D. Nixon's account of Dr. King's choice to head the Montgomery Improvement Association with its punchline, "We picked a number out of a hat and got Moses," knows what a valuable archive these stories are. The best of it is that there are lots more of them that have yet to be written down—all true, with no need of stretchers. Clark's blow to Vivian's head, for instance, made the evening news on television.

Halberstam organizes *The Children* around the eight students who staged the first Nashville sit-in on February 14, 1960: Diane Nash, James Bevel, John Lewis, Gloria Johnson, Bernard Lafayette, Marion Barry, Curtis Murphy, and Rodney Powell. They came from a variety of backgrounds, and their fates over the last four decades encompass a vivid cross-section of the African-American experience. Diane Nash, probably the most brilliant of the group, raised her two children (fathered by James Bevel) as a single mother after her divorce, and has lived to see her great contribution publicly acknowledged. Bevel, the most intense of the lot, is still a prickly personality recently associated with Lyndon LaRouche and Louis Farrakhan, but still as stubborn and independent as when he was goading Dr. King to speak out about Vietnam.

The marriage of Gloria Johnson and Rodney Powell did not last either, but both have had successful medical and teaching careers, and Powell has come to terms with his homosexuality. Curtis Murphy has had an unpublicized but successful career as a teacher and administrator in a Chicago high school, in the same part of the city where I taught for many years. John Lewis is a quietly effective congressman, and Marion Barry is a noisy scamp as mayor of Washington. Barry always was looking out for himself first, but his heroic earlier career deserves the account that Halberstam and Branch

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have given it. Bernard Lafayette eventually got two advanced degrees from Harvard and has had a varied and useful career as a minister and school administrator.

The American civil rights movement of the 1960s was one of the rare occasions when progressive forces made great progress in a relatively short time, and have been able to defend a major portion of those gains. These gains were achieved with remarkably little violence, although there were murders, beatings, and jailings. Compare the two dozen or so names on Maya Lin's monument in Montgomery, to a movement which accomplished great and permanent social change, with the 60,000 names on her Washington monument commemorating a tragic and criminal war. Studying the civil rights movement in even greater detail than Branch or Halberstam provide is one of the best ways to make a repetition of it, as many people in all parts of the world have already learned. When I attended the 30th reunion of the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1994, we learned a new song whose chorus went:

> And who'd have thought long years ago
> When we fought for freedom here
> They'd be singing "We Shall Overcome"
> In Tiananmen Square.

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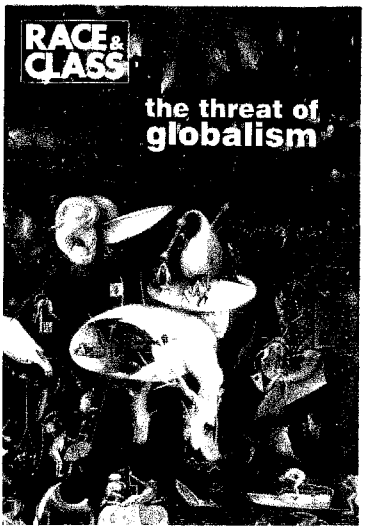

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(Continued from inside back cover)

think that the fault lies with them, their families, possibly their race or ethnic background, with anything but the "free enterprise system."

But maybe we should lighten up. Maybe an art contest like this isn't the place to expose all those ugly realities. So leaving all that aside, what are the kids learning about how the system works? What, for example, are the basic relationships that constitute the system? The first thing is that capitalism is a relationship of *exchange*, an apparently cosy arrangement, with smiling people exchanging desired goods and services in mutually, and equally, beneficial transactions, with the occasional, and temporary, disappointment caused by too many people wanting the same thing (like the swing) at the same time, an imbalance between supply and demand that can be quickly corrected. Crisis? Overcapacity? Forget it. But no doubt that's too complicated for kids (even those who can draw pictures of "circular flow.")

What about labor, then? Where do workers fit in, the educated workers EconomicsAmerica is trying to teach to make "reasoned choices?" Well, we see a smiling kid just finished raking leaves and taking money from a smiling homeowner (one of those mutually agreeable exchanges), but the most sophisticated rendering of labor's position is in a picture about "factors of production." Here we see, first, "Entrepreneurship," represented by a person "thinking of making a chair" because he needs something to sit on. Then we have "Labor," "the people who put together the chair." "Capital" is "hammers, nails, string, needles, wood." And finally, "Land," for wood, dye, and cotton.

This picture is intelligently done, and it certainly does a good job of presenting the basic relations of capital in the time-honored fashion of classical economics. But what do we learn about the most basic relation that constitutes capitalism, the relation between capital and labor? We could, of course, learn a lot if we thought about what it means to treat labor as a "factor of production," a *thing* on a par with capital defined as capital goods like tools and basic supplies. But that's certainly not the intention of a representation where the capitalist appears only in the guise of the creative "entrepreneur," the thinker and maker, (or, sometimes, the "producer": "consumers" and "producers" are often the basic categories) while "capital" is just a bunch of neutral things, and there's no social relation, no class relation, between the human beings that constitute capital and labor.

We socialists certainly do have our work cut out for us.

Our Assistant Editor, Kira Brunner, whom many MR authors and readers have gotten to know and appreciate as much as we do, is leaving the job, but fortunately for another one at MR. She'll be working for the Press and, among other things, organizing events to celebrate our 50th anniversary. So our deepest thanks to her for everything she's done for the magazine, and a very warm welcome to Vicki Larson who is taking over as Assistant Editor.

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(Continued from inside front cover)
on the receiving end of the system's most malignant effects, learn to think of it as a benign, or at least neutral, natural force?

We recently discovered one especially sophisticated approach. One of us has a young relative, a six-year-old first-grader in a mid-Western city which has seen better days as an industrial center. Recently, her parents were surprised to learn that their daughter had won a $25 prize in an art contest—a contest they didn't know she had entered—and was invited to an awards ceremony. This was an Economic Art Contest sponsored annually by an organization called EconomicsAmerica. Kids were asked to produce drawings representing some economic concept, and the winning results were collected in a calendar.

The organization, said the Mission Statement included in the calendar, was "dedicated to improving our community's understanding of economic principles and the free enterprise system. Working primarily through school systems, the Center strives to teach students in grades K-12 to apply economic principles in making reasoned choices as future workers, voters, and consumers." The Economic Art Contest was specifically for students in grades Kindergarten through sixth.

Now, we have every reason to assume that the teachers involved are intelligent people who haven't the remotest intention of indoctrinating their young pupils and have nothing in mind other than instructing them about the world in which they live. But the results, to judge by the calendar, are kind of alarming.

It's not that any single winning entry is, by itself, particularly objectionable. They're rather nice, really. There's the concept of money (the contribution of the young relative we're talking about) represented in the most emblematic six-year-old fashion—involving a little girl, her daddy, and a coveted Beanie Baby (of giant proportions). There's scarcity (e.g., three kids, but only two swings). And there are more complicated representations of supply and demand, circular flow, and the science of economics itself. But the total picture is a serious distortion.

Take the most obvious omissions—like the deprivations and poverty which belong as inherently to the system as do the "laws" of supply and demand. This dark side of "free enterprise" is something many kids in the participating schools know plenty about from direct experience. One of the schools that competed (and several of the winners) were from an almost entirely black suburb with a very high poverty rate and an appalling set of social problems. So we're not just seeing the work of more privileged children. Is it that kids are learning to detach themselves from what they know just to give the teacher what's expected of them? Or maybe it's something even more insidious: that children are learning to disconnect their lived experience from what they're taught about the society in which they live. Victims of the system are being denied the ability, the right, to understand what it's doing to them. Maybe they're learning to

(Continued on page 64)

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